

Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation: A Study of Current Practice in London

Summary Report

This report was commissioned by London Councils and
the London Safeguarding Children Board
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Introduction

1. In autumn 2013, London Councils commissioned a team of researchers from the University of Bedfordshire to map current responses to child sexual exploitation (CSE) across London. This summary report presents an overview of the key findings of the study; please refer to the full report for further details on, and context to, the study.¹
2. The study was conducted in October / November 2013. The findings are drawn from an in-depth quantitative survey (completed by 30 London boroughs and local safeguarding children boards) and eight semi-structured interviews with statutory and voluntary sector providers.
3. The report provides a snapshot of current responses to CSE across London, in relation to:
 - Local scoping of the issue;
 - Local policies and procedures;
 - Training and awareness raising;
 - Identification and early intervention (re. victims and perpetrators);
 - Responding to cases of CSE (re. victims and perpetrators); and
 - Overarching reflections on progress and challenges.
4. Although there is still much progress to be made, the report encouragingly demonstrates that significant work is underway within this field, with pertinent learning emerging from a number of different boroughs.

Key Statistics

5. According to the information provided in the 30 survey returns completed by Assistant Directors (ADs) of Children's Services and local safeguarding children board (LSCB) Chairs in October / November 2013:
6. Local scoping of the issue: Eight London boroughs have a completed CSE problem profile at this point in time. Fifteen more are developing this and just under two-thirds have some other form of scoping mechanism in place (most frequently multi-agency sexual exploitation panels, LSCB CSE sub-groups and/or multi-agency safeguarding hubs).
7. Monitoring numbers of children at risk: Just over half of London boroughs have a system in place to monitor the numbers of children at risk of CSE in their local area. All but two of the remainder are developing this.

¹ The full report can be downloaded from www.londonscb.gov.uk or www.beds.ac.uk/intcent

8. Local Policies and Procedures: Seven out of ten London boroughs have a CSE strategy and four out of five have a local CSE guidance document or protocol. Three-quarters have a multi-agency and/or single agency CSE action plan, whilst three out of five have an information sharing protocol for cases of CSE. One in three currently has an outcomes framework for monitoring progress against their CSE strategy and/or action plans.
9. Multi-agency forums: Six out of seven London boroughs have a CSE specific LSCB sub-group and/or a LSCB sub-group including CSE within its remit. Just over two-thirds have introduced multi-agency sexual exploitation (MASE) meetings as part of their local response to CSE. Seventy percent operate multi-agency safeguarding hubs (or the equivalent).
10. CSE co-ordinators/agency leads: All but one London borough has, or is in the process of establishing, a CSE co-ordinator role holding either an exclusive portfolio for CSE or, more often, dealing with CSE as part of a wider safeguarding remit. Four out of five London boroughs have CSE agency leads within children's services and the police. Proportions of boroughs with agency leads vary considerably by other professions from 71% (youth service) to three percent (Crown Prosecution Service).
11. Voluntary sector partnerships: Just under three-quarters of London boroughs have some form of formal partnership with a voluntary sector agency for tackling CSE within their borough. This includes both pan-London/national agencies and local agencies. Two-thirds of the 21 boroughs who reported having a voluntary sector partnership said that they funded this partnership in some way.
12. Professional training: Just over four-fifths of LSCBs include CSE in their general safeguarding training. The same proportion offer bespoke training on CSE for professionals. The professional groups that this training has most frequently been delivered to across the different boroughs are children's services, education, health and the youth service. Two in five LSCBs have evaluated this training.
13. Awareness-raising with children and young people: Thirteen LSCBs have undertaken awareness raising initiatives with children or young people; a further seven are developing this area of work.
14. Awareness raising with parents/carers and the wider community: Twelve LSCBs have undertaken awareness raising initiatives on CSE for parents/carers; a further nine are developing this. Seven LSCBs have undertaken awareness raising work with wider communities; a further six are developing this. Three have done specific work with licensed premises and six more are developing this particular area of work.
15. Identification of risk: Four-fifths of London boroughs have a set of vulnerability factors that they use to proactively identify children at risk of CSE within their area. Children's services, the police and education are the three most frequently identified sources of referrals for concerns about CSE across the different boroughs. Particular patterns of concern were identified in relation to looked after children/care leavers, missing, gangs and wider patterns of peer on peer abuse.

16. Assessing and responding to risk: Just under three-quarters of London boroughs have a common risk assessment tool in use across agencies for assessing children who are at risk of CSE and identifying thresholds for statutory intervention. Similar proportions have a multi-agency forum in which cases of children at risk of CSE are discussed. There are high levels of representation from children's services, police, education, health and youth offending across these multi-agency operational forums. Youth service representatives are engaged in just over half of the London boroughs, as are voluntary sector providers.
17. Support available for young people identified as being at risk of CSE: Diversionary or early help is available within four out of five London boroughs when concerns are identified about CSE. CSE focused individual work with young people is available in virtually all London boroughs, whilst group-based CSE work is available in just under half. Support for associated issues and support for parents/carers are available in just under two-thirds of London boroughs.
18. Support for victims of CSE: The three forms of support most frequently available across the boroughs for identified victims of CSE were (a) individual therapeutic support (93%), (b) sexual health/relationship education (89%) and (c) drug/alcohol support (89%). These, and other support services, were delivered by a range of statutory and voluntary sector providers.
19. Use of secure, LAC systems and serious case reviews: Half of the London boroughs have secured a young person on welfare grounds as a result of concerns about CSE since 2009. Three-fifths have placed a young person in care as a result of concerns about CSE in the same period, whilst two-thirds have moved a young person out of area for the same reason. Two have undertaken a serious case review (SCR) where CSE was a feature, but none have conducted a SCR with CSE as the primary reason of concern.
20. Identification and pursuit of perpetrators: Three-fifths of London boroughs have a specialist police response as part of their CSE case management system. Half have utilised disruption techniques (such as child abduction notices or prosecution for alternative illegal offences) in responding to suspected perpetrators of CSE. Just under three-fifths have had one or more criminal investigations in relation to CSE, whilst eight have had CSE related prosecutions.

Discussion of Findings

21. The last few years have witnessed significant developments across many London boroughs in terms of their recognition of, and response to, CSE. Progress is clearly observable at a strategic level in terms of the development of policies and procedures, investment in professional training and the establishment of multi-agency groups. Most areas are providing or commissioning some form of support for those at risk of and/or those experiencing CSE with increased recognition of the contribution the community and voluntary sectors can offer in this regard. There is also increased recognition of the need to focus on those perpetrating this abuse and a number of areas have instigated successful investigations and disruption strategies in this regard.

22. Whilst these developments are without doubt encouraging, significant scope for improvement still remains and boroughs themselves recognise this. Both survey respondents and interviewees identified ongoing challenges, and the need for further progress, with regard to a range of issues including:

- Evidence-based knowledge about the nature and extent of the issue in their local area;
- Alternative forms of CSE, such as peer on peer abuse;
- Vulnerability of specific groups, including looked after children;
- Cross-borough working;
- Translating policies and guidance into practice;
- Capacity/resources;
- Preventative initiatives;
- Identification of victims and assessment of risk, vulnerability and resilience;
- Provision of (ongoing) support for victims;
- Identification, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators;
- Community engagement; and
- Sustainable leadership and co-ordination of multi-agency working.

Moving forward

23. Engagement in this study has presented boroughs with the opportunity to map and review their current strategic and operational response to CSE and their recognition of required improvements within this is to be welcomed. Moving forward, it is hoped that each borough will reflect on their individual survey response in light of the composite findings of this report to clarify areas for future development and evaluate their progress in relation to this. It is also hoped that the findings of this study will provide those with a pan-London remit with useful baseline data from which to promote and facilitate more consistent levels of protection for all of London's children.

24. In order to address some of the specific gaps identified in the study, and build on the progress that has already been made by individual boroughs, we would suggest that the following critical issues are given further consideration:

- Problem profiling remains a significant gap in many London boroughs. Those who have developed problem profiles highlight the benefits this has for intelligent commissioning of support services, targeted early help for vulnerable children, and protection for those who have been abused. It is therefore imperative that every LSCB works with statutory and voluntary sector partners to build a comprehensive and up to date local CSE problem profile. Having completed this exercise, the London Safeguarding Children Board and Metropolitan Police Service should consider collating the learning from all local problem profiles to create a Pan-London CSE problem profile to inform cross-borough police operations, safe out-of-area placements and pan-London commissioning.

- While professionals across a large number of boroughs are concerned about gang-associated and other forms of peer-to-peer sexual exploitation, and identify these to be emerging issues of concern, few are confident in how to respond to this particular form of abuse. It is important that Trident and the Sexual Offences, Exploitation and Child Abuse team within the Metropolitan Police Service consider developing supplementary guidance to the MPS CSE protocol for responding to cases of gang-associated sexual exploitation. This guidance could be integrated into local training and communicated to boroughs, and have its impact monitored.
- Assessment of risk, vulnerability and resilience was a challenge raised by a number of boroughs who took part in this study. Surveys suggested that many boroughs were using standardised tools, whereas interviews implied confusion about which tool, if any, were most appropriate. Some boroughs have begun to develop their own CSE specific assessment tools in response, but other areas are concerned about taking a siloed approach to CSE and are instead attempting to improve their response to 'vulnerable adolescents' more broadly. In order to address this inconsistency, the London Safeguarding Children Board and the London Association of Directors of Children's Services should consider clarifying the overlap in guidance and assessments for young people experiencing sexual exploitation, gang-related violence, teenage relationship abuse and those who go missing, and communicate findings and recommendations to all boroughs.
- The size of London and the vast array of pan-London and local voluntary sector service providers who support sexually exploited children present a challenge for commissioners. The difficulty of short-term interventions and the benefits of building trusting relationships with children were echoed in interviews by statutory and voluntary services alike. It is clear that at a local level some local authorities have built successful and trusting partnerships with voluntary sector providers; it is important that such relationships are mirrored across London to assist cross-borough working and to ensure consistent levels of protection for all of London's children. As pan-London funders, The Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime, London Councils and the London Safeguarding Children Board should consider meeting with independent funders to discuss pan-London, and sub-regional, funding options for London's CSE services, and develop a funding strategy which avoids duplication and maximises reach and impact over coming years.
- Participants in this study consistently stated the need to do more to prevent the sexual exploitation of children. Schools were identified as a service that needed to be more proactively involved in preventative activity. However, other promising practice was demonstrated by youth service provision, sexual health and other targeted and universal early help for teenagers. Interviews and surveys suggested that while the need for this work had been acknowledged, its delivery was disjointed and limited at present. To begin to address this issue, every LSCB should consider mapping where preventative work has been delivered within their local area (across schools, sexual health, youth service) and use this process to identify gaps. Such a process would assist commissioners and service providers in prioritising further preventative work and avoid duplication.



The University of Bedfordshire has won the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education for its pioneering research into child sexual exploitation. The prestigious prize is the highest form of national recognition open to higher and further education institutions in the UK and the award enhances the university's widely-acknowledged reputation for its work in raising awareness of child sexual exploitation (CSE).

