

Tackling child sexual exploitation

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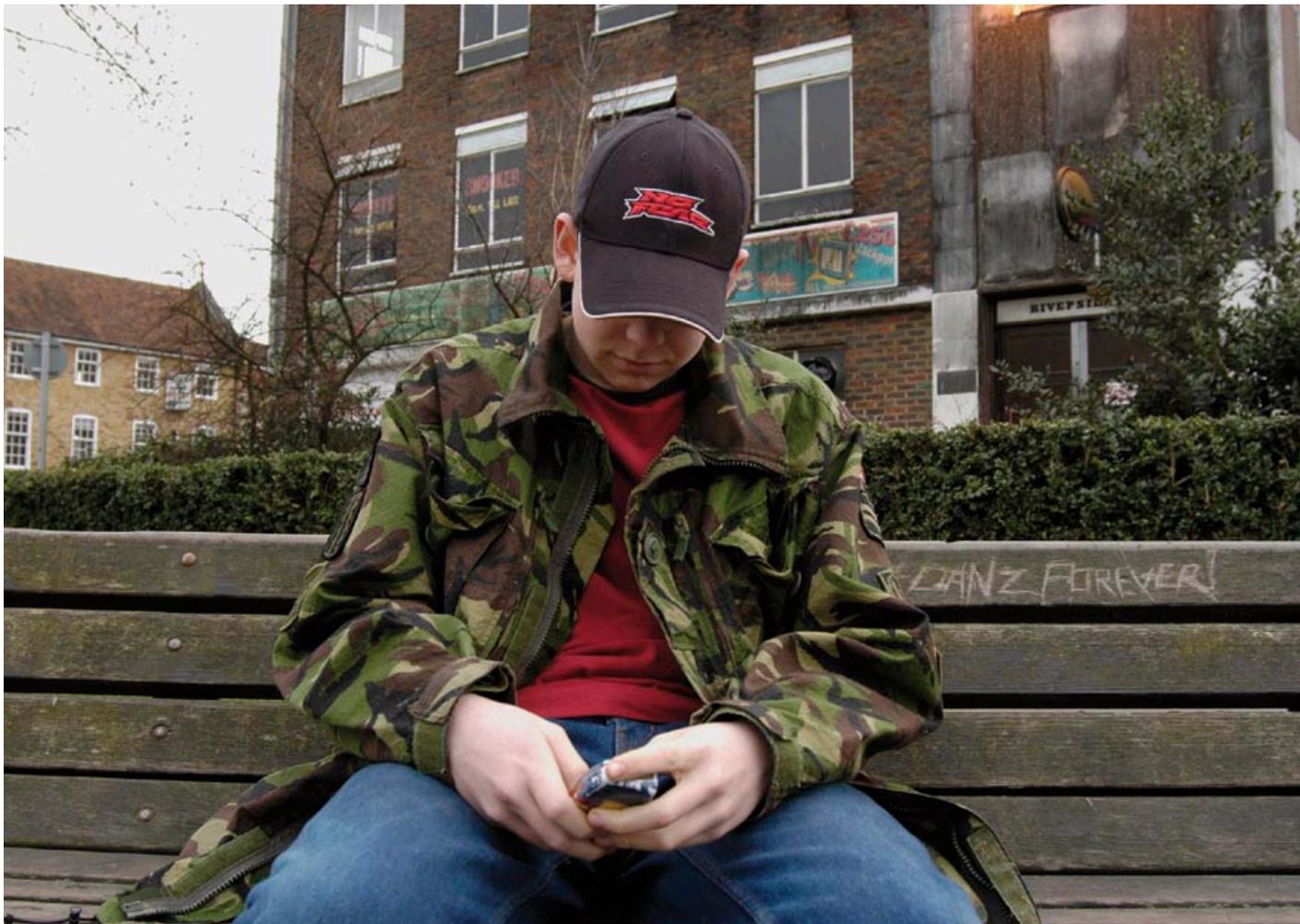
Helping local authorities to develop effective responses

working in partnership with:



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This briefing outlines the elements of an effective local response to child sexual exploitation. It suggests how local authorities and other stakeholders can tackle this abuse, and the advantages of partnership working and information sharing.

Areas will differ in their responses, but some components are central to any effective action. This briefing consolidates guidance, legislation and good practice to show the key elements of a comprehensive local response:

- **raising awareness**
- **understanding what is happening**
- **developing a strategic response**
- **supporting victims of exploitation**
- **facilitating policing and prosecutions.**

These are ongoing processes rather than one-off steps so they need to be monitored and revised against changing local needs if the response is to remain effective. In order to assist areas in establishing and maintaining action, Barnardo's has developed a five-point progress checklist:*

- 1. Are professionals in your area trained to spot the signs of child sexual exploitation?**
- 2. Is a system in place to monitor the numbers at risk of child sexual exploitation?**
- 3. Does your area have a strategy in place to tackle child sexual exploitation?**
- 4. Is there a lead person with responsibility for coordinating a multi-agency response?**
- 5. Are children able to access specialist support for those at risk of sexual exploitation?**

*** Barnardo's (2011-12) Cut them free from sexual exploitation: checklists for local authorities and councillors. See Appendix B for details.**

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Introduction

Child sexual exploitation is a form of abuse. It involves children and young people being forced or manipulated into sexual activity in exchange for something – money, gifts or accommodation or less tangible goods such as affection or status. The sexual activity and exchange may be seen as consensual, but are based on an imbalance of power which severely limits victims' options.¹

Since 2010, the scale of this abuse has become much clearer, with complex police investigations leading to successful prosecutions of multiple abusers, substantial contributions to the research evidence and the launch of a two-year Inquiry by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England into sexual exploitation in gangs and groups.² In 2011, the Government acknowledged the prevalence of this abuse by appointing the Children's Minister as the lead minister for child sexual exploitation and by producing a National Action Plan to ensure that 'everything which can be done is done to make our children safer from sexual exploitation' (Children's Minister, foreword to the National Action Plan).³

A role for local authorities and other agencies

The National Action Plan outlines the expectation that all local authorities will want to:

- assess the local prevalence of this abuse
- develop appropriate responses where risks are identified.

The National Action Plan acknowledges Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) as being central to achieving these aims. It also emphasises the role of

other agencies. Among those mentioned are: schools; police; children's services; health agencies; services for looked-after children and care leavers; and the youth justice system. The Plan also notes how third-sector agencies can raise awareness and help victims to try to recover and to seek justice.

These roles reflect those in the 2009 guidance: *Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation*.⁴ This comprehensive guidance is still relevant and is being reissued, but it was not widely implemented before the National Action Plan. A study by the University of Bedfordshire found that by mid-2011, only a quarter of England's LSCBs had implemented the 2009 guidance.⁵ Implementation has increased since, and by April 2012, almost two-thirds of England's 152 local authorities had pledged to develop an action plan, as measured by those signed up to Barnardo's *Cut them free* campaign.⁶ However, many areas are still developing or updating their response.

This briefing is intended to assist areas in developing and maintaining an effective local response. It outlines five key elements which are central to good practice,⁷ and gives examples of local areas which have demonstrated how these elements help to tackle sexual exploitation.

The key elements are:

1. Raising awareness
2. Understanding what is happening
3. Developing a strategic response
4. Supporting victims of exploitation
5. Facilitating policing and prosecutions.

1. A full definition is given in Appendix A.

2. See Appendix B for key contributions to research evidence by the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), the University of Bedfordshire and Barnardo's.

3. Department for Education (2011).

4. Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009a).

5. University of Bedfordshire (2011).

6. www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree (accessed April 2012).

7. National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (n.d.)

1. Raising awareness

‘It is important that all young people develop the knowledge and skills they need to make safe and healthy choices about relationships and sexual health. This will help them to avoid situations that put them at risk of sexual exploitation and to know who to turn to if they need advice and support. ... The need for information goes wider ... to raise the awareness of parents and professionals as well.’⁸

The National Action Plan and the 2009 supplementary guidance on safeguarding from child sexual exploitation both emphasise the importance of awareness raising for two reasons:

- to help protect children and young people from being abused, by teaching them what to look out for, what to do if they are threatened and where to turn for support
- to identify those who have been sexually exploited, by informing parents and carers and by training professionals in what to look out for and what to do if they suspect abuse.

It is essential that people are aware of the threat and the signs of sexual exploitation – even if it does not *appear* to be occurring in their area. Firstly, children and young people spend time in many different areas. Secondly, local threats and crime patterns change over time. Thirdly, and most significantly, showing people what to look for typically prompts recognition that this abuse *is* occurring in an area, and can lead to increased identification of young people who are at risk.

The positive impact of training on awareness was widely noted in the

evaluation of Barnardo’s three-year awareness-raising programme for multi-agency professionals across London.⁹ One local authority in the south-east found that its own awareness-raising activities were followed by a notable increase in sexual exploitation referrals, as a senior safeguarding officer explained:

Three months after improving agencies’ understanding of sexual exploitation, we had seen a five-fold increase in the number of young people identified as high risk.

Informing children and young people

Schools are well placed to raise awareness among children and young people. Citizenship, Sex and Relationships Education, or Personal, Social, Health and Economic education and similar classes can raise the issues of consent and healthy relationships which are essential to discussing sexual exploitation. However, teachers may not be confident about discussing the issue, so schools may want to draw on specialists (as recognised in the National Action Plan).¹⁰

As with many other organisations working on this issue, Barnardo’s sexual exploitation services deliver awareness-raising sessions to thousands of young people in schools and other settings. Staff and young people who participated in a recent preventative programme highlighted the importance of being informed so that young people could be better protected.¹¹ The teaching staff emphasised the benefits of drawing on expert knowledge, whilst the young people were often surprised that sexual

8. Department for Education (2011) para. 29 and para. 34.

9. Barnardo’s (2012b).

10. Department for Education (2011) para. 30. The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People website lists organisations and resources which can be used in preventative work: www.nationalworkinggroup.org/resources (accessed April 2012).

11. Barnardo’s Preventative Education Programme (PEP) 2008-11 was delivered to 4,700 young people. It was evaluated as increasing awareness of risks, and of how to keep safe and seek help. The young person’s and teacher’s quotes are from the evaluation.

exploitation could affect people from any background, as these quotes from a teacher and from a young person show:

Often sex and relationships education is too biological ... this had a broader reach.

It was very useful to learn how people do grooming so it will make us more vigilant. Also the fact that they told us a real story shows us that these things do happen.

It is important to reach young people in all educational settings, not just in secondary schools or pupil referral units (short-stay schools). Age-appropriate guidance in primary school can outline key messages before there is an immediate threat, and some under-13s will be at risk. Children at special needs schools will also benefit from tailored information on risks and safety strategies, as there are emerging indications that children with disabilities may be particularly vulnerable.

Areas may also want to consider how school staff can be given awareness-raising training, either as part of multi-agency training or in school-based sessions. The evaluation of the Barnardo's preventative programme showed that teachers themselves found the class sessions informative, but areas may also choose to include others involved with education. One midlands LSCB has run awareness-raising sessions for secondary school staff, is currently running another for head teachers and governors and will be holding one specifically for governors. The LSCB also recommends that chairs of governors ask head teachers or designated members of staff each year about a school's risk levels and responses to child sexual exploitation. The LSCB will assist governors in this by providing a checklist of key questions. The LSCB's awareness-raising plans also include

focusing on schools or pupil referral units which are identified as risk 'hotspots'.

Informing parents and carers

Parents and carers need to be aware of the risks and signs of sexual exploitation to help protect children or help them to access support if they are abused. The National Action Plan lists signs which 'should cause both parents and professionals to consider whether a child or young person is a victim, or potential victim, of child sexual exploitation'.¹² Barnardo's and other organisations have outlined warning signs and guidance for parents and carers.¹³ Some areas have created leaflets to describe the key signs and direct people to further assistance. However, people may not find guidance until *after* abuse has occurred, so it is important to consider how to make people aware of the resources. LSCBs may wish to provide awareness-raising opportunities for parents and carers, and highlight routes to information and support for those who suspect that a child is at risk.

One LSCB in the midlands developed a factsheet outlining what parents and carers should look out for, how they can protect and support their children and how to contact social work services or police if they are concerned that their child is at risk. The factsheet is online but is also being promoted through parents' networks and groups, as the LSCB Business Manager explains:

We are using existing forums to spread the word about our factsheet for parents and carers so more people know how to spot the signs and how to get support.

Training professionals

The National Action Plan reminds LSCBs that they are responsible for ensuring that training is provided to meet local

12. Department for Education (2011) para. 14.

13. www.barnardos.org.uk/get_involved/campaign/cutthemfree/aboutcutthemfree/spotthesigns (accessed April 2012).

1. Raising awareness

needs for safeguarding and promoting children's welfare – and that child sexual exploitation must be considered when local training priorities are decided. As LSCBs are expected to 'assume that sexual exploitation occurs within its area unless there is clear evidence to the contrary',¹⁴ and training tends to prompt recognition of sexual exploitation, it is appropriate for LSCBs to provide training to key professionals. Core agencies include social care, police, youth offending, health and education, but key frontline workers could be children's home staff, street wardens, town centre and shopping centre wardens, park staff and staff in pubs, clubs or hotels.

The scale and form of training will vary with LSCBs' priorities and resources, but there are three key methods. These can be combined to ensure that staff have appropriate levels of knowledge:

- External expertise: training by a specialist service, typically for multi-agency staff, but may be single-agency; sessions for strategic professionals are strongly recommended.
- Internal knowledge sharing: formal training or less-formal information sharing from staff who have developed specialist knowledge, either through their work or training; this system is also used to pass on learning and resources gathered at external training.
- E-learning: training online by individuals, sometimes supported by internal or external specialists, but often self-directed; this can introduce the issue to a wide range of staff or provide new and updated information to those who already understand the problem.

An LSCB in Yorkshire has contracted an external expert to deliver a series of training, and staff from all relevant agencies are encouraged to attend. The Board Manager explained that the LSCB had decided to offer even more training in the current year as the course had proved so popular:

We run one-day courses so practitioners can understand how young people become sexually exploited, why it can be difficult to seek help or escape this type of abuse, and to learn more effective ways of working with them. We knew that the courses were always in demand, as it's such an important issue and the training is excellent, so this year we used some additional funding to double the number of sessions.

14. This statement is made in both Department for Education (2011) para. 9 and Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009a) para. 4.5.

2. Understanding what is happening

‘Robust and reliable risk assessments by LSCBs of the nature and extent of child sexual exploitation in each area are fundamental to tackling the problem. ... LSCBs and statutory agencies should *always* undertake risk assessments of the extent of the problem in their area.’¹⁵

The National Action Plan states clearly that areas should *assume* that sexual exploitation is occurring and should review local data to establish the prevalence and character of this abuse. Fewer than half of England’s LSCBs were recording data on sexual exploitation before the publication of the Plan,¹⁶ but the benefits are significant. Unless information on this abuse is collated and reviewed locally, identifying an area’s particular issues, it is difficult to know what response is appropriate.

One local authority in London began assessing how many young people were at risk by focusing on those who were already known to the Youth Support Teams. The numbers are expected to increase once all the relevant agencies are aware of the issue and know how to identify children as being at risk, but even the initial figures were very high, as the LSCB Manager recalls:

We ran a scoping exercise and found 50 young people at risk of sexual exploitation.

Local profiling exercises can take different forms, but the most effective are comprehensive and use information from a wide range of agencies – including voluntary-sector services. They can be tailored to fit an area, taking note of

local characteristics (such as rural/urban location), but good practice would suggest that they include information on the following as a minimum:

- **Incidence of child sexual exploitation**
Evidence of child sexual exploitation is most readily understood if it is collated centrally, so that data held by police, health and other agencies is in a common database. LSCBs can facilitate information sharing by creating a common form for gathering evidence. Agencies are often concerned about breaching data protection, but many local arrangements already work well, and the development of local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) is likely to foster this.
- **Information on local trends**
Information on the patterns of known or suspected sexual exploitation will strengthen any risk assessment by establishing common forms of grooming and abuse in the area. Collating this data is likely to highlight local ‘hot spots’, addresses and abusers’ names or nicknames – and provide some indication of whether and how the abuse is connected to other areas.
- **Prevalence of core risks**
Information on the core risks known to be related to sexual exploitation can be gathered to indicate the probable extent and character of this abuse.¹⁷ Young people who go missing are known to be at particular risk of sexual exploitation, as are those who are looked after, but the risks to young people who live at home and do not go missing must not be sidelined.¹⁸ The National Action Plan and the 2009 safeguarding guidance both outline the core risks.¹⁹

15. Department for Education (2011) para. 23 and para. 50.

16. University of Bedfordshire (2011).

17. Barnardo’s (2007).

18. Home Office (2011); Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009b).

19. Department for Education (2011) para.16; Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009a) para. 6.9 and para. 6.12 – note para. 6.12 relates to boys and young men.

2. Understanding what is happening

As exploitation patterns can change quickly, it is in LSCBs' interests to continue gathering data – even if the scoping exercise provides little evidence. The University of Bedfordshire has devised a data monitoring tool to assist LSCBs in collecting information on those affected.²⁰ Such tools can provide data on victims but also need to be supplemented with data about where, when and how exploitation occurs to properly inform local responses. Many LSCB child sexual exploitation strategies do include data reporting so the Board can assess whether and how it should modify its response, as in this northern LSCB's strategy:

The LSCB child sexual exploitation coordinator is responsible for updating the LSCB every six months about the prevalence, scope and nature of child sexual exploitation in the area.

There are also advantages in making links with other LSCBs in order to compare data and establish a wider or regional picture reflecting how perpetrators and victims move and associate across local authority or police boundaries.



20. Available from University of Bedfordshire or National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People: www.nationalworkinggroup.org/resources (accessed April 2012).

3. Developing a strategic response

‘LSCBs develop an effective local strategy ensuring there is a co-ordinated multi-agency response to child sexual exploitation, based on a robust, thorough risk assessment of the extent and nature of child sexual exploitation locally.’²¹

Having a strategy gives agencies a central reference for understanding child sexual exploitation and what has been planned to address it. The exact form of a strategic response or action plan will vary in each area, but good practice shows what could be considered in devising responses. These examples are concise, describing child sexual exploitation, outlining local agencies’ roles and showing how they link to related issues, such as going missing, domestic violence or gang activity.

The process of establishing the scale and nature of local child sexual exploitation will inform the LSCB’s strategic response, but it is advisable to begin developing a strategy even before the data are complete. Actively looking for sexual exploitation tends to uncover considerable evidence of it, so LSCBs may want to have a response ready for young people identified as being at risk.²²

Aims: child-centred prevention, identification, support and prosecution

Strategies will have three core aims: prevention, identification and support. Good practice areas also aim to improve action against perpetrators, through disruption and prosecution. A strategy may detail specific roles for individual agencies or emphasise shared responsibilities for tackling exploitation. Whichever approach is taken, a strategy is advised to be child-centred and assert that child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse and that the core purpose of

the strategy is to protect the welfare of children and young people at risk.

Multi-agency working is recognised in the guidance and practice as essential to addressing sexual exploitation. Strategies are advised to emphasise this throughout, making clear the expectation that all agencies seek to identify young people at risk, and work together to devise appropriate responses – whether an agency’s specific role is focused on prevention, support or prosecution. The need for joint working is clear in this child sexual exploitation strategy from the midlands:

The involvement of different roles, experience and perspectives is essential if children and young people are to be effectively supported and action taken against perpetrators of sexual exploitation. All agencies should be alert to the risks and able to take action, working jointly where an issue is identified.

Areas need to consider the scale at which a strategy should operate. Child sexual exploitation often involves the movement of victims from one area to another, and victims or perpetrators may also live in one area and associate in another. Areas may wish to consider whether local issues could be best addressed through a cross-borough or regional strategy. The north-east, for example, introduced regional inter-agency procedures on child sexual exploitation in 2005.

A broader strategy may be particularly useful in linking police forces, addressing obstacles that can arise in working across police borders on a case-by-case basis. This was the experience of seven local authorities in one region, which recognised that they needed to work with the local police force as a whole to reflect

21. Department for Education (2011) para. 55

22. See for example p. 37 of CEOP (2011).

3. Developing a strategic response

the movement of both children and adults between areas, to share good practice and to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Outlining the issue: definitions and indicators of risk and vulnerability

A comprehensive description of child sexual exploitation shows agencies what to look out for. The definition in the National Action Plan was developed by agencies tackling this abuse and is now the standard description.²³ Many areas use it because it fits with government guidance and is comprehensive, although strategies will need to note that child sexual exploitation takes other forms and can change. Strategies could also list key risk indicators and vulnerabilities, identifying any that have particular

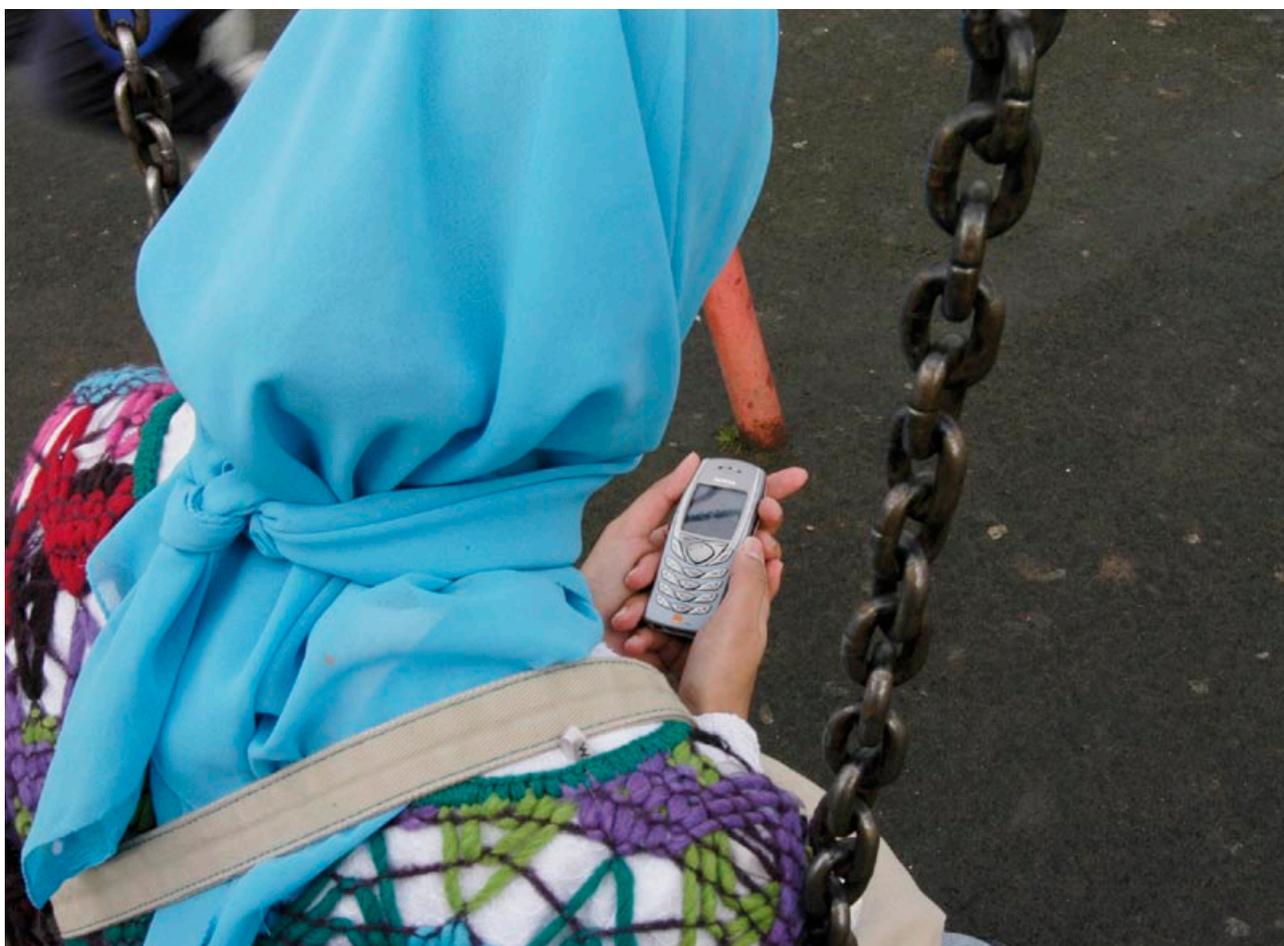
local relevance once the area profile has been conducted.

Providing a clear description of child sexual exploitation and raising awareness of the issue will assist agencies in identifying children and young people who may be at risk of this abuse. Those who are identified then need to be risk assessed and referred for an appropriate response.

Identifying victims: risk assessments and referrals

A strategy document can provide specific guidance on conducting risk assessments. Areas may choose to adopt or adapt one of the many in use. The most widespread originated in research, was refined in practice by

23. See Appendix A and The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People: www.nationalworkinggroup.org/resources (accessed April 2012).



Barnardo's, and has been adopted as the All-Wales Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment and by some English police forces and LSCBs.²⁴ It is known as SERA or SERAF: Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment/Framework. Police-led tools such as the Child Sexual Exploitation Process Mapping Tool, developed by the Serious Organised Crime Agency, and a sexual exploitation risk-mapping system developed by West Mercia Police, may also be used by multiple agencies to assess whether a young person's behaviour or risks are indicative of sexual exploitation.²⁵

The advantage of a single risk assessment is that the relative severity of cases and common patterns will be evident. Seven local authorities which have developed a regional strategy, for example, are now developing a single risk assessment with the regional police force to facilitate joint working. However, some staff may use the Common Assessment Framework to make initial assessments. Agencies may also have their own tools: the Metropolitan Police Service, for example, developed a Child Risk Assessment Matrix (CRAM) for use by child protection teams.

A clear referral mechanism is important, outlining how those assessed as being at risk are to be referred so a response plan can be made. Some areas use a flowchart to show how to respond. If there is a specialist support agency, a risk assessment may be sent straight there, but a copy also needs to go to the LSCB so it can track the case, ensuring that appropriate action is taken for each victim, as well as compiling data on the local prevalence and forms of sexual exploitation.

LSCBs hold the core responsibility for safeguarding children and young

people against this abuse so are advised to put themselves at the centre of local responses. However, the structure of a response can vary widely. The National Action Plan is clear that 'there will be a range of different local systems and different people involved according to local needs'.²⁶ Two key components take many forms: meetings to plan and monitor responses and the coordination of the strategy.

Devising the response: multi-agency meetings

At the core of any strategic response is the need for multi-agency strategy meetings to plan and monitor action. There are many formats for such meetings. Their frequency, composition and links with strategies on other issues will vary from area to area. Most will focus on exploitation alone, but some may seek to address both child sexual exploitation and an associated issue, such as young people who go missing or gang activity. Many will be attended by only a core group of agencies most closely linked to tackling sexual exploitation, but there are definite advantages to having a broader involvement, in particular if other agencies can engage on a routine basis.

The composition of strategy meetings may also be influenced by the specific purpose they are given. Most will discuss several children or young people and will give time to discussing perpetrators, but some may focus on one young person or may be called to focus specifically on perpetrators. One area in the north-west which holds frequent strategy meetings uses them to assess risk to individuals and in particular places, as the LSCB Business Development Manager explained:

24. Barnardo's (2007).

25. www.soca.gov.uk (accessed April 2012); www.westmercia.police.uk (accessed April 2012).

26. Department for Education (2011) para. 48.

3. Developing a strategic response

Our multi-agency meetings share information which can help in identifying sexual exploitation 'hotspot' areas.

Information sharing will be central to the meetings, however formatted; successful exchange of information supports both the identification of victims and the development of appropriate responses. Agencies may be concerned about data protection constraints, but the strategy document can emphasise the benefits and outline local approaches. Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) are being established in many areas and offer a secure repository for confidential and protected information, which can then be shared with specific agencies. Some areas have developed their own systems. One area has created a secure website to assist information sharing at the multi-agency sexual exploitation meetings. Others have set out clear information-sharing protocols.

One LSCB in the midlands has established close communication between sub-groups which may be discussing the same children, given links between the risks of going missing and exploitation.²⁷ The LSCB Business Manager explains that the exchange of information between the sub-groups is intended to provide a better picture of risks in the local area, ensure that the needs of all young people at risk of sexual exploitation are identified, and enable agencies to deliver more appropriate support:

Our Young Runaways steering group and Child Sexual Exploitation steering group share information to ensure an effective response to young people at risk of harm.

Managing the response: coordination

Taking a strategy from protocol to delivery requires coordination. The two common options, used together in some

areas, are to have an LSCB Child Sexual Exploitation sub-group or appoint an LSCB Child Sexual Exploitation lead. Good practice examples show that both sub-groups and lead officers can catalyse and inform responses to sexual exploitation. However, the success of either is largely dependent on strong support for the issue at a strategic level and multi-agency engagement. Clear leadership can assist agencies in pursuing the agenda, while sub-groups need consistent attendance and leads need close and durable links with agencies if either are to make a major contribution. Key agencies include: a minimum of police, social care, health, education and education welfare; plus if possible, youth offending, probation, housing, youth service and voluntary-sector services.

An advantage of having both a sub-group and a lead officer is that they can support one another. Lead officers can monitor the delivery of actions decided by sub-groups, whilst sub-groups mean that the lead officer is not operating alone in promoting the issue of sexual exploitation. Having a full lead officer post is preferable to allocating the role to someone with other responsibilities, as the role may become very extensive when local awareness levels and identification improve.

Another option is for individual staff to become child sexual exploitation champions or leads for their agency. These leads may be the first to receive training or could receive extra training. One advantage is that this spreads knowledge across agencies engaged in tackling this abuse. The leads could also share their training and relative expertise with colleagues, and hear from them about the prevalence and forms of sexual exploitation, as the LSCB Manager for this north-western area explains:

27. These links are acknowledged in both Department for Education (2011) and Home Office (2011).

3. Developing a strategic response

Each LSCB agency appoints a lead professional as their single point of contact for sexual exploitation. They attend the Sexual Exploitation Operational Group and they are also responsible for providing advice and support to staff.

Three examples of different approaches to managing the strategic response are outlined below, based on a number of different areas which are demonstrating good practice.

Area A has developed a network of trained Child Sexual Exploitation Leads in each key agency. These leads receive any risk assessment conducted by colleagues within their agency and decide whether it requires immediate intervention through a referral to Children's Social Care or can be taken to the regular multi-agency meetings held to review all child sexual exploitation cases. These meetings are held as part of the LSCB's activity. One particular advantage is that the same leads attend most meetings, a consistency that can foster a common understanding of the issues and confidence in the multi-agency working which underpins the local response. The meetings are chaired on a rota system. The area has already written a local protocol to show individual agencies their responsibilities and roles and is now in the process of working with two neighbouring authorities and the police forces to develop a comprehensive tri-borough strategy.

Area B has a single Child Sexual Exploitation Lead within the LSCB. This appointment focuses entirely on ensuring that the LSCB is meeting its responsibilities on sexual exploitation. The lead is the central point for all risk assessments conducted across the area, who refers any which need immediate action to the Social Services Duty Team and then arranges a multi-agency meeting

to discuss all referrals, focusing on those agencies which are most relevant to the cases. The lead gathers core documentation, takes and distributes minutes and coordinates the chairing of the meeting. One specific benefit of this arrangement is that the lead can monitor the delivery of any action plan developed for a young person as well as tracking all referrals and meetings.

Area C does not have any leads, but it does have an LSCB Child Sexual Exploitation sub-group. This meets monthly and discusses all new risk assessments submitted by agencies as well as the progress of ongoing action plans. The sub-group also allocates time to share any new information on perpetrators and patterns of risk (for example, addresses of concern). The sub-group can be attended by a wide range of agencies, both statutory and voluntary sector, but a core set of six agencies are represented regularly: social care, police, a specialist youth health agency, youth offending, education welfare and a children's home. The sub-group has created an online system by which information can be shared securely between agencies. The sub-group identified a need for high-profile policing in two parks, and the police responded.

4. Supporting victims of exploitation

‘It is essential that there is an effective response from services when child sexual exploitation is identified. ... Victims need a helpful, swift, understanding and supportive response, coordinated across partners ... [and] need to be helped to understand how they will be helped now and in the future.’²⁸

Young people and children who are sexually exploited are best served by support being tailored to their circumstances and needs. Any response will be determined by the victim’s level of risk and by what agencies and services can offer. Options range from what is seen as the ‘gold standard’ of co-located multi-agency teams offering direct support to victims, to the minimum of preventative guidance for those who are vulnerable. The range shows that children can be supported even in the context of severe pressure on local resources.

Direct work

Those who are at high risk or already exploited will benefit most from intensive direct support. Direct work typically has three aims: preventing immediate harm; helping the young person exit exploitation; and supporting victims in any prosecution of the perpetrator(s). It seeks to engage young people in understanding and addressing the risks they face, as well as providing positive activities, practical assistance (e.g. with applications for housing) and some therapeutic support. A number of models have been developed; many reflect Barnardo’s ‘Four A’s’ approach:

- Access: easy referral procedures (some self-referral) to welcoming environments

- Attention: key worker gives positive, consistent attention from a trustworthy adult
- Assertive outreach: persistent contact and engaging service users where they choose
- Advocacy: support service users to access other services and explain their situation.

Direct work is considered to be most successful where it offers support of at least 18 months, but short-term interventions of six to nine months can also be effective.²⁹ Although expensive, having intensive support can significantly improve young people’s outcomes and may reduce longer-term costs: £1 spent on Barnardo’s model has been associated with a £12 cost saving for the Exchequer and could bring savings for individual agencies.³⁰ Options include spot-purchasing interventions or commissioning a broader service from an agency, but areas may also choose to set up a new provider, possibly in conjunction with neighbouring local authorities. Areas could use pooled budgets to fund provision. Mixed funding sources were drawn on to establish a new multi-agency service in the north-west, as a founding team member explains:

The LSCB commissioned a direct service for young people from [one voluntary-sector agency], with the police funding a dedicated police officer as part of the team and [another voluntary-sector agency] bringing its own funding to raise awareness.

Specialist services with expertise in tackling child sexual exploitation are well placed to meet the challenges of engaging

28. Department for Education (2011) para. 40.

29. Barnardo’s (2012a).

30. Barnardo’s (2011).

such vulnerable people and helping them to recognise and exit this abuse. The website of the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People lists agencies offering such work.³¹ Most are in the voluntary sector, but some local authorities have developed their own teams, including co-located multi-agency teams. Multi-agency partnerships, especially those that include the police, can have distinct advantages over looser networks of support: establishing shared expectations and approaches, facilitating information sharing and coordinating support with action on perpetrator(s). These benefits are amplified by team members being co-located, as found in evaluations of Barnardo's co-located police/social worker Eclipse service³² and noted in the University of Bedfordshire's comprehensive 2011 study:

the most successful organisational model is where specialist staff from a range of agencies work together in a dedicated multi-agency unit. ... The data revealed a significant difference between the achievements of agencies working together in co-located multi-disciplinary teams and those where partnership working is yet to develop 'off the page' of the local strategy.³³

Indirect work

Young people and children who are identified as being at lower or moderate risk of exploitation will need protective interventions to prevent their risks increasing and help them stay safe. A support plan could include referral to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or help in accessing sexual health services. A plan could also provide guidance on risks and keeping safe, whether this is delivered by a lead agency

within the strategic cluster or by a third party. One advantage of using agencies with which a young person is already connected is that they are not given yet another professional or agency with which to engage. In the east, for example, one Youth Offending Team already discusses these issues with young people with whom they work. Specialist services can assist agencies in tailoring advice and guidance to a young person's needs and comprehensive information is available.³⁴

The situation of young people or children initially judged as being 'lower/moderate risk' is best reviewed at least once after a plan is made for them. This provides an opportunity to assess the plan's implementation and to check whether there is further information which would prompt a change to the plan. A review will also assess whether the risks have changed, requiring a more substantial or direct response. This review will indicate whether their situation and risks should continue to be monitored, or whether the strategic response can conclude once the plan is complete. Each area will need to consider whether non-engagement with the planned work is a reason for removing a young person or child from the strategy, even if they are still at notable risk. Barnardo's would recommend keeping them on the strategy so agencies can offer support when these vulnerable young people and children recognise their need or feel ready to engage.

Accommodation

Some young people and children who are at high risk of sexual exploitation or who are already being looked after by the local authority may need alternative accommodation as part of their support plan. The 2009 guidance states that

31. www.nationalworkinggroup.org/services (accessed April 2012).

32. Barnardo's (2010).

33. University of Bedfordshire (2011) p. 39 paras 4.25-4.26.

34. See, for example, Community Care Inform (forthcoming)

4. Supporting victims of exploitation

such accommodation does *not* need to be secure.³⁵

Young people who are being sexually exploited will need good quality placements with carers who have experience of building trusting relationships and skills at containing young people. These placements do not have to be secure. Placing a child or young person in secure accommodation should only be considered in extreme circumstances, when they are at grave risk of significant harm.

Areas may consider offering specialist training to foster carers to develop a local pool of carers who can provide additional support to young people and children at risk of sexual exploitation. Such training is being offered in some areas as part of a two-year government pilot,³⁶ but it could also be included as part of the local programme of awareness raising and training – especially as the National Action Plan expects this to include carers and parents as well as professionals.

35. Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009a) p. 51.

36. Department for Education – Safe Accommodation pilot 2011-2013. See www.barnardos.org.uk/fosteringandadoption/familyplacement_local_authorities/fosteringandadoption_local_authorities_specialisms/specialistfostercare.htm (accessed April 2012).

5. Facilitating policing and prosecutions

‘Disruption techniques should be a key part of local strategies for responding to child sexual exploitation. ... LSCBs should develop a disruption plan and establish relationships with other agencies to deliver it.’³⁷

Local Safeguarding Children Boards and statutory agencies have a responsibility not only to assist victims but also to disrupt the abuse and, if suitable, facilitate the prosecution of perpetrators. The National Action Plan’s emphasis on getting justice for victims echoes the 2009 safeguarding guidance that ‘While taking steps to protect a child from sexual exploitation, professionals should also consider how best to gather and preserve evidence to prosecute the perpetrators of the exploitation’.³⁸ This emphasis is reinforced by the fact that victims of child sexual exploitation have themselves identified better approaches to policing and more appropriate treatment during prosecutions as two of their five priorities for change.³⁹ The issues that can be encountered by young victims and witnesses in the prosecution process are beyond the scope of this briefing, but there are steps which can support the policing of perpetrators and potentially improve a prosecution case.

Information about risky adults’ association with vulnerable children can be used to disrupt abuse without involving the child. The National Action Plan calls on LSCBs to ‘develop a disruption plan and establish relationships with other agencies to deliver it’.⁴⁰ One technique is to issue child abduction notices (formerly

called harbouring warning notices) to prevent a named adult from associating with the child. However, disruption plans could include informing adults that they are under suspicion, conducting covert investigations, using automatic number plate recognition systems to track vehicles linked to those under suspicion, or using health and safety legislation or licensing regulations to review public venues suspected of being used for exploitation.

Efforts to disrupt, arrest or prosecute perpetrators depend on the quality of police information. The community and the wide range of agencies can make a significant contribution to policing by sharing what they know about risky individuals, young people at risk and patterns of behaviour. However, police may need specific details before they can use such information as ‘evidence’. Safe and Sound Derby worked with Derbyshire Police to create an information-sharing sheet so agencies could strengthen the quality and relevance of their evidence for police, and this could offer a template.⁴¹

Collaborative efforts such as the roll-out of local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs, use of joint intelligence rooms and creation of secure information-sharing websites should also provide police with more and better information. One extensive investigation into sexual exploitation in the south-west established a joint intelligence room to facilitate the ‘real-time’ exchange of information between the core agencies, as the lead detective inspector explained:

Our operation against sexual exploitation set up a joint intelligence room so police,

37. Department for Education (2011) para. 53.

38. Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009a) para. 6.38.

39. What Works for Us (2011) p. 8: ‘Priorities for change – As presented to the Deputy Children’s Commissioner’

40. Department for Education (2011) para. 18.

41. www.safeandsoundderby.co.uk (accessed April 2012).

5. Facilitating policing and prosecutions

children's services, probation and health could share their intelligence as it came in.

The development of police-led, multi-agency crime and risk mapping tools⁴² may also assist policing and support prosecutions by enabling agencies to contribute their knowledge on high-risk areas and individual cases. Such tools should show how sexual exploitation varies across areas and changes over

time, prompting police and other agencies to look beyond any single form of exploitation. They may also show that the abuse involves victims and perpetrators outside the area, emphasising the need for collaborative working across police and borough boundaries.

42. For example, the Child Sexual Exploitation Crime Process Mapping Tool developed by the Serious Organised Crime Agency and the multi-agency sexual exploitation risk mapping system developed by West Mercia Police

Summary

Multi-agency working underpins the development and implementation of any effective response to child sexual exploitation. Local areas, led by the Local Safeguarding Children Boards, will be best placed to respond if they acknowledge that such abuse could be occurring and develop a collaborative approach to identifying and tackling the problem. Effective responses will involve:

Raising awareness. Young people and children, professionals, parents and carers will benefit from being informed about the issue. This will be most effective if it is an ongoing process, and is adapted as information emerges about the local forms and levels of child sexual exploitation.

Understanding what is happening. Information is needed to guide awareness-raising efforts and underpin the strategic response. An initial scoping exercise is important but areas are advised to monitor the levels and character of child sexual exploitation on an ongoing basis.

Developing a strategic response. A strategy will set out how those identified as being at risk of sexual exploitation can be given an appropriate response. Good practice shows that a response is best planned by multiple agencies, even if it is subsequently delivered by only one.

Providing victims of exploitation with appropriate support. Children at higher risk will benefit most from direct intensive support from agencies or multi-agency teams with specialist expertise. Those at medium or lower risk will benefit from having guidance on keeping safe and being reviewed at least once to check whether they require additional support.

Facilitating policing and prosecutions of perpetrators. Multi-agency information sharing can be improved so evidence can better guide police action. Disruption techniques can also be used more comprehensively to protect young people and children from further abuse.

Appendix A: Definition

The National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People developed the definition of child sexual exploitation which is now used by government and other organisations:

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.

Appendix B: References

Key documents

Barnardo’s (2011-12) *Cut them free campaign:*

Cutting them free: How is the UK progressing in protecting its children from sexual exploitation? www.barnardos.org.uk/cuttingthemfree.pdf.

Puppet on a string: The urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation. www.barnardos.org.uk/ctf_puppetonastring_report_final.pdf.

Cut them free from sexual exploitation: A checklist for local authorities. www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree_labriefing.pdf.

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Appendices

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Barnardo's (2012a) *Interim evaluation of the PEP Recovery Project.* Barnardo's, Barkingside.

Barnardo's (2012b) *Final report of the Preventative Education Programme 2008-11.* Barnardo's, Barkingside. Report, summary and seminar presentations can be found at www.londonscb.gov.uk/sexual_abuse/ (accessed April 2012).

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National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (n.d.) *10 steps to an effective local strategy.* www.nationalworkinggroup.org/what-is-child-sexual-exploitation/developing-an-effective-local-strategy (accessed April 2012).

What Works for Us (2011) *Young People's Advisory Group: Annual report 2010-11.* Barnardo's, Barkingside.

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exploitation***

*Helping local authorities to
develop effective responses*

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