



**Report of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny
Committee**

**Interim Review of Child Sexual Exploitation
arrangements in Cheshire East**

February 2015

CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
THE MORE YOU KNOW THE MORE YOU SEE

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 This is an interim report of the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Task and Finish Group investigation into the Council's CSE safeguarding arrangements.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 At its meeting held on 1 December 2014, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee (the Committee) appointed a Task and Finish Group to investigate the adequacy of the Council's arrangements to protect young people in Cheshire East from Sexual exploitation. The members of the Task and Finish group were:



Chairman: The late Councillor Phil Hoyland (Left)

Councillors: Arthur Moran, Gill Merry

(The task and Finish group has been assisted also by Councillor Jos Saunders)

- 2.2 The Task and Finish group met 7 times over the period 15 December 2014 to 31 January 15 and has interviewed 10 individuals.

- 2.3 The Task and Finish group agreed the following terms of reference:

"To seek assurances about the Council's safeguarding arrangements in relation to CSE, to advise the Cabinet and the Council's partners on any improvements that are considered appropriate to local arrangements and to raise awareness of CSE across the whole community of Cheshire East. This will be achieved through a review to be undertaken over a 2 month period beginning on 1 December 2014 and concluding on 31 January 2015 by a Task and Finish group comprising 3 Members of the Children Families and Adult Social care Overview and Scrutiny committee, supported as the need arises by other members of the Committee"

- 2.4 This interim report should be read in conjunction with the related appendix (September 2015)

3.0 Findings

- 3.1 The starting point for the investigation was the national focus given to CSE resulting from the recent cases of grooming and sexual exploitation of young people in Rochdale and Rotherham. The subsequent publication of the Jay report, which had been critical of the various agencies responsible for safeguarding in Rotherham and the report produced by Anne Coffey MP commissioned by the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner to

review the Greater Manchester response to CSE added to the evidence that some local authorities had questions to answer in respect of their procedures for dealing with CSE. In light of these and other high profile cases, Members decided to review Cheshire East's arrangements to protect against CSE, specifically to seek assurances that arrangements are fit for purpose and agile enough to address any issues relating to CSE in Cheshire East, no matter how they arise.

- 3.2 As the investigation has progressed it has become clear to the Members involved, that this is a big task. In just over 2 months, we have met 10 individuals, most of whom are involved in CSE at a strategic level. We still have many more people to speak to within the Council and possibly countless more from organisations outside of the Council. We are grateful to all those who have given their time to date and assisted us with our enquiries and in so doing, have greatly enhanced our knowledge of CSE.
- 3.3 Whilst not wishing to finalise our conclusions at this early stage, we have been heartened to discover that CSE is taken very seriously by the Council and its statutory partners.
- 3.4 We are confident from what we have heard that the procedures and policies we have in place are good. CSE takes many forms, and although there is no evidence of the large scale systematic CSE that has occurred elsewhere, there is evidence of isolated cases of CSE in the borough. We are satisfied that when cases come to light, all agencies act swiftly. Of course, we can only deal with what we know, and for this reason the Council and its partners have to remain vigilant at all times. The training programmes we have in place for schools and partner agencies in health etc. are vital in making sure that not only staff within these fields understand and recognise the signs of CSE, but take action when they have suspicions, or just as importantly, when matters are brought to their attention.
- 3.5 We were particularly pleased to hear that plans are in place to put together a dedicated multi agency team under the direction of Kate Rose the Head of Children's Safeguarding Unit to ensure that CSE is kept high on the agenda, and we will watch with keen interest how this group develops.
- 3.6 There are some minor areas of concern at the moment, and we will ensure that our early findings are reported to the appropriate responsible officers.
- 3.7 The first is outside the scope of our review and was a matter originally brought to our attention by the police. This relates to the licencing arrangements for taxi and private hire drivers.
- 3.8 We were concerned to discover that there is not only a lack of consistency in respect of the conditions attached to licences in different local authority areas but that there is very little evidence that intelligence is shared between authorities, especially about applicants who, for instance, may have made an unsuccessful application in one area, but subsequently secure a licence with another authority. We also discovered that if a driver has committed a criminal offence or breached the conditions of the operating licence the police will notify the licensing authority, but this may not necessarily be the authority in which the driver mainly operates. This is a concern, because we have strong evidence to suggest that many private hire/taxi drivers who operate within Cheshire East are licenced by other local authorities. The details of

our concerns will be passed on to the licensing officers, but we acknowledge that this is a national issue and may have to be tackled through regional networks.

- 3.9 The Task and Finish group has been impressed with the strong partnership working arrangements afforded by the co-location of key staff from ChECS, the police, and the child protection team at Dalton House Middlewich and would encourage those arrangements to continue when the staff are re-located to Sandbach in the near future.

4.0 Observations

- 4.1 Below are the Group's key observations:

- 4.2 It is clear that the chair of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board LSCB, Ian Rush has a close working relationship with the Director of Children's Services (DCS) and his team, however the independence of the LSCB chair also needs to be clear. There is no suggestion that this is currently in doubt, however we feel the formal reporting line should be direct to the Chief Executive, notwithstanding, operational matters will be dealt with by the DCS and his team.

- 4.3 We are aware that the Chief Executive recognises the importance of the LCSB attends the boards meetings and has provided an open door policy for the Independent Chair of the Local Children's Safeguarding Board. However given the nature of the LSCB's work the group were pleased to hear that the Chair of the LSCB now has direct structured access to the Chief Executive.

- 4.4 Education and health teams should have direct input in to the ChECS service and police and funding is put in place to allow the Education Welfare officer to sit with this team as a matter of priority and immediate consideration be given to making sure that cover is made for sickness and holidays.

- 4.5 That, efforts should be maintained to ensure that training and practice are followed through at grass roots level across key partnerships especially schools, surgeries and hospitals. We would seek assurances about how this information is cascaded through organisations and monitored for effectiveness on the ground, especially as many of the partner organisations now operate as commissioners and therefore rely on contractors to ensure delivery. We would ask: Is this nimble enough?

- 4.6 There is evidence of good practice and communication between agencies but in some cases this appears to have occurred because of the individuals involved rather than as a result of a formal requirement. However, we have concerns about potential weaknesses especially in respect of those agencies which operate across boundaries between Cheshire East and Greater Manchester, especially Stockport and Trafford to the north and Staffordshire authorities to the south. Contacts need to be formalised at both senior and grass route level.

Councillor Phil Hoyland
February 2015