Hertfordshire’s Strategy to Prevent Child Sexual Exploitation

1. Introduction

This strategy sets out the commitment of the Hertfordshire’s Safeguarding Children Board (HSCB) to do everything possible to prevent and support victims of child sexual exploitation.

The HSCB has identified addressing CSE as a priority and is committed to implementing a strategy to ensure a shared approach to tackle the problem. Guidance identifies the HSCB as having a fundamental strategic role in relation to addressing CSE. This strategy signals our shared commitment to tackle child sexual exploitation and provide the right help to children and young people who are affected by it. The strategy provides a definition of child sexual exploitation, outlines the challenge we face locally, the principles that will inform what we do, our priorities and objectives and how we will monitor progress in achieving our ambition of fewer children and young people being affected by this appalling form of exploitation and abuse.

2. Definition

The sexual exploitation of children and young people (CSE) under-18 is defined as that which:

‘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’ (Department for Education 2012 definition and adopted by Hertfordshire’s Safeguarding Children Board)
3. The Challenge

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) has a devastating impact upon children and young people. There has been a tendency to assume CSE has an impact upon very small numbers of children in particular locations. However, recent reviews of its prevalence have concluded that there will be children and young people at risk and being abused in most local authority areas and the numbers are increasing. Perpetrators and victims of CSE come from all age ranges and ethnic groups. Child sexual exploitation is not exclusive to any single community, race or religion. There is no culture in which sexual exploitation/abuse is not a serious crime.

Most sexually-exploited children live at home when their abuse begins. It is clear that increased awareness amongst parents, young people, carers, professionals across the partnership and the wider public of the nature and indicators of CSE is essential to both preventing the risk of and ending ongoing exploitation.

CSE is a specific issue which needs to be tackled strategically and operationally including actions from specialist agencies. However, young people who are being sexually exploited or are at risk of this are often subject to a range of interrelated risks which affect vulnerable young people. This might include involvement with gangs and serious youth violence, going missing from education, substance misuse and self-harm amongst others. Being frequently missing from home or care is a particular risk factor. With all of these issues, the focus of professional action will mainly be on vulnerable adolescents rather than younger children. While some victims may have histories of abuse within their own families, the risks associated with CSE are usually located outside of the family and home. Perpetrators may be known peers or unrelated adults rather than family members. There is also often a need to address unsafe places as well as unsafe adults.

Therefore a key priority of this strategy is to ensure that professionals and other adults in contact with children and young people are alert to risk factors and indicators of a range of safeguarding concerns which do not reflect the more common focus of child protection activity. They also need to be aware of how to support such young people and the range of specialist agencies that can either advise them or provide targeted support to address risk factors which may indicate or lead to CSE as well as providing a clear response when CSE is confirmed to be taking place.

4. Our Objectives and Priorities

The strategy will focus on the following key areas:

- Understand the scale of the problem in Hertfordshire and develop a co-ordinated multi-agency response
- Provide intensive support around the young person, their family and peers.
• Give equal focus through the three pronged approach to CSE; **Prevent, Protect and Pursue.**
• Raise awareness of sexual exploitation of professionals, families and the community.
• Disrupt hot spots, houses, hotels, shopping centres being used and report to licensing bodies where appropriate.
• Set out a plan of action to achieve these objectives

**We aim to Prevent by:**

• promoting self-esteem, positive relationships and resilience so that fewer children and young people are at risk from people who would sexually exploit them
• raising awareness amongst children, young people, their families and the wider community about what child sexual exploitation is and where to get help
• reducing tolerance of behaviours that underpin exploitation and abuse in personal relationships
• improving access to health and relationship advice for children and young people both in schools and those not in mainstream education
• improving the effectiveness of people working with and caring for children and young people in recognising child sexual abuse, and taking appropriate action
• building the effectiveness of help and interventions to prevent children and young people who have been identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation
• strengthen and assure the arrangements to safeguard vulnerable children known to be at greater risk of child sexual exploitation and abuse
• reduce the number of episodes of children and young people going missing
• improve school attendance and reduce the time children are missing education.

**Protect by:**

• building the effectiveness of help and interventions in protecting children and young people who are or have been sexually exploited
• providing help that enables children and young people to recover resilience and overcome the harm caused by the abuse they have experienced
• engaging and listening to children and young people in developing, delivering and monitoring the impact of risk management plans to prevent and tackle child sexual exploitation
• sharing and using information/intelligence effectively so that analysis leads to effective targeted action to prevent sexual exploitation and protect children and young people

• making best use of resources in planning, commissioning and delivering services to support children, young people and their parents and carers

• developing the capability of the workforce in working with child sexual exploitation

**Pursue by:**

• disrupting and preventing the activities of individuals intent on child sexual abuse and exploitation

• maximising the use of enforcement powers to interrupt the activities of perpetrators

• taking action against perpetrators, including bringing them to justice for crimes they have committed

Agencies in Hertfordshire are determined to work together, proactively across the partnership to identify those vulnerable to sexual exploitation, build resilience, prevent exploitation taking place and prosecute perpetrators of this crime. We will work with young people, their families, professionals, and communities to raise awareness of the issue, and ensure our early help services are well placed to provide effective support and minimise the risk of young people becoming victims.

5. **Principles Underpinning our Practice**

Effective multi-agency work and reaching out to children, young people, their families and the wider community is key to the success of this strategy. These principles inform our practice in preventing and tackling child sexual exploitation:

**Key principles**

- Children and young people are not responsible for their own abuse.

- Children and Young people are groomed and manipulated by perpetrators to secure their compliance.

- Children and young people are not in control of the abuse or the situations they find themselves in.

- Effective Information Sharing

We will:
• Be child centred and focused on taking action that has a positive impact for
the child or young person. We recognise that children and young people can
be both victims and perpetrators, and move between these roles. We will take
the wishes of children and young people into account whilst acknowledging
that some do not recognise what may be an exploitative and abusive
situation. Sexually exploited children should be treated as victims of abuse,
not as offenders. Targeted work with children and young people identified as
being susceptible to exploitation reduces vulnerability.

• Work and support children and young people who are victims of sexual
exploitation to break free from exploitation and recognise they are often
distrustful of adults and statutory services. Whilst there may be situations
which require emergency interventions to protect young people, our approach
is to work collaboratively, support and empower young people and their
families to find solutions themselves wherever possible as often they are best
placed to influence and help them change how they think, feel and behave
about the situation they are in and where it may lead. We can reduce
vulnerability and the risk of exploitation through providing targeted support
and education.

• Work with the wider community to promote a better understanding of child
sexual exploitation and how it can be recognised and tackled. Community
includes neighbourhoods where families and young people live, and it
includes the public realm and places where children and young people are
groomed, exploited and abused.

• Be proactive in sharing and analysing information so we identify and profile
children and young people at risk before they are exploited and abused. This
will enable us to provide targeted prevention interventions to individual and
groups of children and young people, and to understand how we can reduce
the risk to children and young people when they go to specific locations.

• Ensure effective sharing and analysis of information across agencies so we
effectively protect children and interrupt perpetrator behaviour and bring them
to justice whilst placing the protection and welfare of children and young
people first. Children who are sexually exploited are victims of child sexual
abuse and we will hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour through
disrupting their activity and criminal prosecution. We will not place or leave
children and young people at risk of harm in order to achieve better evidence
and greater likelihood of prosecution. We will find innovative ways of using the
law to disrupt and hold perpetrators to account. (As CSE usually includes
sexual abuse of children and criminal activity, then existing guidance on
information sharing relating to seeking and potentially overriding of consent
applies).
6. Monitoring the impact of the strategy

Governance is key and the HSCB will be informed and challenge the progress of this strategy.