

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Lives Select Commission – 14 June 2022

Report Title

Annual Report on Child Exploitation

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Suzanne Joyner, Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report provides a summary of key Child Exploitation activity in the borough including performance information and trends, awareness raising and safeguarding, undertaken in the year 2021 – 22.

Recommendations

That the activity undertaken with regards to Child Exploitation be noted.

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Annual Report on Child Exploitation

1. Background

- 1.1 The National Strategy, Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy 2021 defines Child Sexual Exploitation: forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving violence, or whether the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, and may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse.
- 1.2 Home Office Guidance defines Child Criminal Exploitation as: where an individual or group coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 to take part in criminal activities, including but not exclusively County Lines. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology
- 1.3 The National Strategy has three Objectives:
1. Tackling all forms of child sexual abuse and bringing offenders to justice
 2. Preventing offending and re-offending
 3. Protecting and safeguarding children and young people, and supporting all victims and survivors
- 1.4 Rotherham's Local Strategy, A Strategy to Tackle and Prevent Child Exploitation 2019 - 2022 was developed by the multi-agency partnership under the auspices of the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (RSCP).

Whilst it was published after the national strategy, it follows the key objectives:

1. Safeguarding Vulnerable Children
2. Support to Victims and Survivors
3. Learning & Development
4. Child Protection and Detection of Crime

The local Strategy is driven by the Child Exploitation Delivery Group, a subgroup of the RSCP.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 This report provides information on key activity in relation to Child Exploitation in the year 2021 / 22. The report demonstrates how we ensure that children, both individual and groups, that are at risk of or who are

experiencing exploitation are identified, safeguarded, and supported. There is a partnership approach to raising awareness and preventing exploitation of children and young people in Rotherham.

2.2 Responding to Child Exploitation (CE)

Where there are concerns about the safety of a child who is potentially at risk of CE, a referral is made to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) where screening is undertaken to identify the next steps. To make an informed decision the team share and gather information from partner agencies, children and their families and the most appropriate intervention is agreed in response to the child or young person's identified needs. This could be signposting to Early Help services and/or a more detailed assessment by a social worker is undertaken, and the young person may then be allocated to a specialist worker in the Evolve Service if identified as medium or high risk and needing level of support.

2.2.1 Rotherham is one of a small number of authorities in the country to retain a specialist multi-agency team. In any one month the Evolve service are working with approximately 91 children and young people. This can fluctuate as children are allocated to Evolve and when their cases are stepped down to a lower level of support.

2.2.2 In July 2021, the Evolve team commenced a six-month pilot to include Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) within their remit alongside Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), creating a singular Child Exploitation pathway, and utilising the expertise and knowledge within the Evolve team and applying it to Criminal Exploitation also. The pilot was able to evidence impact for children through better identification of this cohort of children, using tested methods that followed the same approach as CSE.

2.2.3 Following the success of the Pilot significant investment was provided to increase the staffing levels to translate the pilot to business as usual and meet the demands of both CSE and CCE under one pathway, Child Exploitation.

2.2.4 Children that go missing, particularly those that repeatedly go missing and children looked after can be more at risk of forms of exploitation. Throughout the year there has been a significant focus on those children, providing a robust response. Through positive work with children, residential homes, and foster carers the number of Looked After Children who go missing has significantly reduced, alongside repeat episodes, with the year ending on the lowest number of LAC children reported as missing throughout the year.

2.2.5 These decreases in missing episodes can be attributed to the extensive work undertaken by the Missing Advocates. The return home interviews are key to responding quickly to identify issues and support the young person to reduce further missing episodes. In Rotherham we ensure that all children that are reported missing are offered a return home interview within 72 hours.

2.3 The work that is undertaken in the identification and safeguarding of children and young people is supported by several child exploitation intelligence meetings. These meetings have contributed to the safeguarding of a number of children across Rotherham and continue to be an invaluable process in keeping children safe.

2.3.1 **Child Exploitation Tactical group (CETG)** is a weekly multi-agency group led by South Yorkshire Police and attended by CYPS, which brings key partners together who agree on the specific response and the next steps to the concerns and risks of Child Exploitation. The police bring on average 6-8 pieces of intelligence to each meeting for consideration and actions. Actions include police investigation, community work, child abduction orders and arrest warrants referring children to Children's Social Care – MASH.

The success of this group has recently been independently reviewed as part the Independent Review into CSE in Rotherham led by Jenny Myers and was found to be robust and good practice.

2.3.2 **Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE)**. In 2022 the MACE meeting replaced the RAM (Risk Assessment Management). The change brought Rotherham into line with national terminology ensuring that those in attendance at the meeting, including partners from across a regional border, understood the remit of the meeting.

2.3.3 MACE meetings are held to provide a clear and consistent identification and assessment of children at risk of child exploitation. Individual children / young people are discussed at the meeting to aid information sharing across a variety of agencies across the local area to highlight vulnerabilities, threats, and to establish and reduce risk. The meeting discuss concerns about children and young people who may be at risk from Child Exploitation, gang related crime, and human trafficking. There are 3/4 review MACE meetings held each week, and three initial MACE' meetings to consider any new child/young person.

2.3.4 **The Multi-Agency Operational Missing meeting** takes place fortnightly to identify ways to reduce the number of young people who go missing. This meeting focuses on the most regular high risk missing young people. Preventative work is undertaken with these children on 1:1 basis to safeguard, provide intervention, build a relationship, and to look at diversionary activities.

2.3.5 **Post Abuse Support, Child Sexual Exploitation commissioned services for victims and survivors**. Following a tender exercise, the Post CSE Contract was awarded to the three incumbent providers, Rotherham Rise, Grow and Rotherham Abuse Counselling Service (known as Rothacs). The contract commenced 1 January 2021 and is a three year contract with an option to extend for a further 2 years. The service is an all age service; however, this is predominantly to serve transition working as there is an internal pathway of support within the Council for under 18's.

- 2.3.6 The specification for the contract has built in a consultative referral pathway through the Trauma and Resilience Service (TRS) which is delivered through RDaSH and funded by the CCG. Using this pathway, professionals can refer cases into these services, and TRS will allocate cases to the specific service above according to available capacity and specialisms. This is designed to ensure there are no waiting lists and that expert oversight is provided in case allocation. In addition to this route, service users can self-refer direct to the providers.
- 2.3.7 The contract is now coming out of a stage of mobilisation towards “business as usual”, and officially launched on 18 May 2022 at the Whole Service Events for CYP Social Care and Early Help.
- 2.3.8 For the first time in the operation of this Service, the three providers have agreed a common set of KPIs to track throughput and activity. Joint performance meetings, with all three providers and TRS, and have taken place quarterly.
- 2.4 **Awareness Raising and Training.** In response to ongoing exploitation investigations, there has been continued awareness raising throughout the year through various sessions regarding Child Exploitation including and specifically the following examples.
- 2.4.1 **Members Session - Introduction to Child Exploitation, tackling it in Rotherham.** In January 2022, two sessions were delivered to members on Child Exploitation in Rotherham. There were 29 Councillors in attendance across both sessions. This was a positive event, Councillors were fully engaged with this important subject matter, and asked lots of questions. Presenters included representation from Children and Young People Services (CYPS), Children’s Community Safety and Rotherham South Yorkshire Police.
- 2.4.2 The sessions informed Councillors how to report concerns, the awareness raising that takes place including Spot the Signs activity, prevention including Make Safe (targeting local hotels and B&B), investigation and prosecutions, and the safeguarding pathways. The feedback was positive, that it was informative and assuring. These sessions will becoming annual refresher sessions going forward.
- 2.4.3 **Safeguarding Awareness Week (SAW),** took place the week commencing 15th November 2021. The regional launch was hosted by Barnsley Local Authority, and took place physically at Northern College, Wentworth Castle, and online.
- 2.4.4 There were 31 events available to book onto with 615 staff across Rotherham registered attending. Presentations included Child Exploitation and County Lines from SYP, Exploring the challenges of working with adults who self-neglect and/or hoard.
- 2.4.5 The presentation by Dez Holmes, Director of Research in Practice, was in keeping with a workshop delivered by the two Principal Social Workers in

Rotherham, on Transitional Safeguarding, and was pertinent to Rotherham as we deliver services across ages, including all age post CSE support, children with disabilities, and leaving care service.

- 2.4.6 **Child Exploitation Awareness Day on 18 March 2022.** Information was shared throughout the Council via the Monday Briefing and through the Chief Executives Friday Briefing. This included how staff can access and complete the mandatory e-learning modules, Safeguarding Everyone General Awareness and Keep Them Safe. Screensavers were also used on all council laptops and posters were circulated digitally to schools for display in staff areas. Councillors received a poster and Spot the Signs information cards via the Town Hall and social media posts were shared throughout the day on Community Safety and corporate RMBC channels. This was an ambitious endeavour and considered successful thanks to its reach across a large workforce.
- 2.4.7 **The Spot the Signs** campaign was refreshed for Safeguarding Awareness Week (SAW21) in November 2021. Posters were shared by South Yorkshire Police (SYP) on social media, and a poster was shared with all schools on signs to be aware of in education settings for display in staff areas. Internal information and comms were circulated within RMBC along with the Spot the Signs screensaver set on all RMBC laptops to raise awareness amongst staff. Social media posts were shared via RMBC and reached over 18,000 people, and over 400 people visiting the link provided in the posts to the RMBC Child Protection web page.
- 2.4.8 **Operation Keepsafe** is well established multi-agency targeted activity, that focus on working in particular areas to engage with young people to raise awareness of exploitation.
- 2.4.9 Between April and November 2021 Early Help and South Yorkshire Police led on 27 Keepsafe Interventions across the Borough including Rawmarsh and Rosehill Park, Wath Town Centre, Maltby and Dinnington, and engaged with 1602 young people since the start of April 2021. This has potentially impacted positively and has resulted in a decrease in the number of Keepsafe interventions. Prevention continues to be provided in the community.
- 2.4.10 **Operation Makesafe** is a joint police and local authority project that has been taking place throughout the year targeting the hospitality industry to drive the message and equip hospitality industry staff with the knowledge and skills to recognise potentially exploitative situation and take positive action. Material around 'spot the signs', was provided to local hotels to be displayed in their staff rooms, alongside a jointly produced Evolve/South Yorkshire Police video for staff to watch and asking hotel managers to sign commitments to provide ongoing staff training. In addition, several plain clothes test purchasing operations were completed to test staff knowledge, and awareness and responses. These visits were undertaken during Safeguarding Awareness Week in November 2021. Follow up visits to hotels were completed and managers were provided feedback. Where hotels 'failed' the test visit follow up visits were undertaken, and these Hotels

have already put additional measures in place including the use of a code word in one hotel to raise the alarm for other staff if they are concerned about someone at check in.

- 2.4.11 **Digital Safety** is a key concern regarding Child exploitation. Training has been delivered to over 60 professionals around young people sharing images online, the risks this poses and the support and information available to help address this issue. The attendees were predominantly from Children and Young People Services, and the feedback has been positive, particularly in relation to the resources and links to online information and support provided.
- 2.4.12 **The Evolve service** continues to raise awareness through delivering of Child Exploitation training on a quarterly basis. The training targets Secondary Heads, Post 16 education providers, social workers, residential providers. In total we have trained 150 staff. In addition to this the team have attended team meetings, and a variety of schools to raise awareness.
- 2.4.13 Following each of these sessions there is an increase in professionals contacting for advice and support.

2.5 **REMEDI Victim Engagement Project**

In 2021, 94 recorded crimes with the CSE keyword attached from 2020 were viewed by SYP to identify any themes or trends to better understand why cases didn't progress to conviction and if any different action could have been undertaken. This concluded in September 2021 and identified that crimes had been well investigated and that safeguarding had been put in place where identified.

Following on from this work SRP commissioned REMEDI to undertake consultation with a small number of survivors from the original 94 recorded crimes. The cases were filtered to remove any cases that would not be appropriate for involvement in the consultation.

Consultation was undertaken in February and March this year and the final report with findings presented to SRP in June 2022. The findings will be included in the Child Exploitation Action plan, and updates reported into the SRP and form part of wider learning opportunities.

- 2.6 The National and Local Strategy provides a framework which the Child Exploitation Delivery Group uses as the foundation for activity for The Council and its partners to work closely and collaboratively at strategic, tactical, and operational levels. It provides a variety of processes for tackling CE including having clear, seamless processes and reporting mechanisms and information sharing between partners, and a robust response to safeguard children where concerns are referred in.

There is an abundance of awareness raising and training provided, including Safeguarding Awareness Week, Child Exploitation Day, and a

variety of awareness raising initiatives and prevention activities taking place in the wider community to educate and raise awareness about CE.

We commission services to provide post-CSE support, taking an innovative approach to ensure no waiting lists and survivors receive the right support for them.

And we are committed to continual learning with our partners including engaging with survivors, hearing their voice and learning from their experiences.

All these systems together ensure that we have a robust response to Child exploitation across the system.

2.7 Glossary

Child Exploitation	CE
Child Sexual Exploitation	CSE
Child Criminal Exploitation	CCE
Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership	RSCP
Safeguarding Rotherham Partnership	SRP
Child Exploitation Delivery Group	CEDG
Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub	MASH
Early Help	EH
Looked After Children	LAC
Child Exploitation Tactical Group	CETG
Multi Agency Child Exploitation	MACE
Trauma and Resilience	TRS
Children and Young Peoples Services	CYPS
Safeguarding Awareness Week	SAW

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 This report is for information and to provide feedback on the progress made to date on the Inspection Action Plan

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 There are no specific proposals as the report is for information purposes.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 There are no specific Timetables as the report is for information purposes.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no specific Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications as the report is for information purposes.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 There are no HR implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 This report details the activities undertaken with regards to identification and safeguarding of children and young people from child exploitation 2021 / 22. It details our ongoing responses and commitments to providing a robust system within the council and in working in partnership with organisations from the statutory, Health, Education, Police, and voluntary sectors to keeping children safe.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 There are no Equalities and Human Rights implications arising from this report.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 There are no implications in relation to emissions or climate change arising from this report.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Working together 2018, the National and Local Strategy places statutory responsibility on organisations to work together to keep children safe. Whilst this report identifies activities undertaken by the Council, we are committed to working together

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 Any deterioration in the commitment to the strategy both internally and the wider partnership including the delivery group, could lead to a deterioration on the robust arrangements for keeping children at risk of CE safe,

Accountable Officer(s)

Laura Gough Head of Service Safeguarding Quality and Learning

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

	Name	Date
The Strategic Director with responsibility for this report	Nathan Heath (In absence of Suzanne Joyner)	31/05/22
Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Councillor Cusworth	31/05/22

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This report is published on the Council's [website](#).