

Child Sexual Exploitation

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The Jay Report into child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham has placed councils' role under the spotlight. The LGA has developed an action plan to support councils in addressing the issue of CSE. This report sets out what the LGA's action plan covers and the role of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board within it.

Recommendation/s

- (a) Note the report and the LGA's work around child sexual exploitation; and
- (b) Comment on the work the Safer and Stronger Communities Board is undertaking as part of the LGA's action plan to support councils in tackling CSE.

Action/s

Officers to take forward actions identified by members.

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Background

1. Council efforts to tackle child sexual exploitation have been thrown sharply into the spotlight following the publication of Alexis Jay's inquiry into historic failings in Rotherham Borough Council.
2. Although the report was specifically concerned with events in Rotherham, previous enquiries have been clear that the sexual exploitation of children is an issue of concern for communities across the country. The Office of the Children's Commissioner reported the findings of a two year enquiry into child sexual exploitation in November 2013. The enquiry found 2,409 confirmed victims of child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups across England during the 14-month period from August 2010 to October 2011, but was clear that the actual number of victims was likely to be significantly higher. The report identified a further 16,500 children at risk of sexual exploitation over the same period.
3. All councils must therefore work closely with the police, health and the wider community to tackle this issue head on, and the Local Government Association has put in place an action plan to support the sector. The work is being led by the Children's and Young People team within the LGA and oversight of the LGA's action plan is provided by the chairs of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board, the Children and Young People's Board and the Improvement Board.

Support for councillors

4. Protecting vulnerable children and young people is a council-wide, moral and statutory responsibility, and an important strand in the LGA's action plan is about ensuring that all councillors are supported to play their part as effective corporate parents.
5. In July 2013, the LGA, working with partners on the Children's Improvement Board, produced a range of resources to assist councils in addressing child sexual exploitation locally. These are currently being reviewed and refreshed, and will include:
 - An introductory briefing on CSE, including key risk factors and the role of different agencies
 - CSE myth busting guide
 - Overview of learning from the Jay Report and other recent enquiries
 - Key lines of enquiry for all Councillors, including the role of scrutiny
 - An overview of available sector support (e.g. safeguarding peer reviews)
 - A range of case studies and practice examples from across the country
6. The LGA provides additional support to councillors in their wider role as corporate parents, and this offer will also be reviewed. Current products include advice for those scrutinising services for looked after children, a good practice overview of fostering and adoption activity, and examples of activities to boost the profile of corporate parenting locally.
7. Councils can also access direct support through the LGA's regionally based Principal Advisers (PAs) and Children's Improvement Advisers (CIAs). These advisers are the

LGA's focal point for discussions with councils about their improvement needs and the support that can be provided, working with existing sector owned improvement bodies at sub-national level and with colleagues supporting children's services improvement.

8. In response to demand from councils, the LGA will continue to provide free peer reviews and diagnostics. This offer includes Safeguarding Children Peer Reviews, Safeguarding Practice Diagnostics, and Care Practice Diagnostics. All of these provide a robust peer review support offer to identify areas of concern and outline how these can be addressed to improve outcomes for children and young people.
9. Children's portfolio holders and scrutiny chairs can access the LGA's Leadership Essentials Programme. The 2014/15 Leadership Essentials Programme includes a session on safeguarding and the role of the LSCB, and will focus strongly on the lessons arising from the Rotherham review.

Review of local safeguarding children boards (LSCBs)

10. Government guidance emphasises the importance of LSCBs ensuring that the needs of children and young people who have been, or may be, sexually exploited and their families are considered. There are, however, questions over the extent to which LSCBs are able to effectively fulfil this role alongside the range of other tasks expected of them. As part of its work the LGA will be reviewing current arrangements for LSCBs and whether these are currently fit for purpose.
11. The LGA has developed a peer diagnostic (3 days) framework for LSCBs, which is currently being piloted ahead of full roll out in the new year. This will be available to all councils, and will include a specific focus on efforts to tackle child sexual exploitation in the area.

Modelling the impact of rising demand and funding pressures

12. Demand for children's social care services has increased at an unprecedented level in recent years. The number of referrals to children's social care teams has increased by over 10% in the past five years, and the number of children requiring intensive support through a child protection plan has increased by 32%.
13. Councils have so far managed to protect budgets in this crucial area from the effects of 40% cuts from central government, and spending has actually increased in many areas. The Audit Commission recently reported that council spending on children in care increased by 4% over the past 4 years, to a total of £3.4 billion. However, the number of children in care rose by 12% over the same period, illustrating that even protected budget struggle to keep pace with demand.
14. The LGA will model the critical impact of ongoing funding reductions alongside this rising demand for services, including consideration of future funding cuts and the projected impact of the heightened profile for safeguarding arising from the Jay Report. This work will be used to contribute to discussions on the Government's next Spending Review.

Support for the wider council workforce

15. The Jay report highlights the ways in which Rotherham Council engaged its workforce as being very solid and an important component of the improvement journey, for example through a focus on continuous professional development. This accords with LGA efforts through the Employer Standards for Social Work.
16. The LGA established a member task-and-finish group that has agreed a campaign to support councils with the recruitment and retention of social workers. In particular, councils have identified difficulties in retaining experienced social workers, often having to rely on expensive and temporary agency staff which can impact on continuity within the service. Case studies and podcasts will be produced and there is a growing programme of joint work with the College of Social Work.
17. Councils mobilise a vast workforce, and it is crucial that safeguarding children is recognised as a council-wide responsibility amongst staff. All council staff are well placed to be alert to any children at risk of harm and know what to do if they encounter vulnerable children and young people.

The role of the Safer and Stronger Communities Board

18. The role of licensing and regulation is a particularly strong theme in the Jay Report. As a result there are a number of areas of work where the Safer and Stronger Communities Board will be contributing to the LGA's action plan. These include:
 - 18.1 Developing training for licensing officers on spotting and/or preventing CSE.
 - 18.2 Incorporating information on child sexual exploitation in the LGA's Regulatory Services training module for councillors, which explains the ways in which councillors can use regulatory services to support and meet the needs of local businesses and residents. This will be fully reviewed to ensure that learning from recent cases is included. Similarly, the LGA's Taxi Licensing Handbook for Councillors will be fully refreshed and relaunched with clear reference to child sexual exploitation and the importance of robust licensing procedures.
 - 18.3 Improving the flow of information between LSCBs and council licensing teams to prevent licensed premises from being used to conduct sexual exploitation. As LSCBs are a responsible authority under the Licensing Act 2003, the LGA will be providing support and guidance to them on how they can better fulfil this role.
19. The Jay Report highlighted the need for councils to widen and deepen their engagement with the communities they serve. There is a natural tendency to talk to prominent and vocal community members, meaning there can be less contact with for example women and young people.
20. The LGA will gather examples of good practice on community engagement, and work with faith and community bodies at a national level to develop guidance for councils on engaging with communities on sensitive issues not only including CSE, but also issues such as FGM.

21. It is apparent from the Jay report that in a number of instances, both families and communities were aware of or had strong suspicions about CSE taking place. Ignoring such serious concerns would be contrary to the public sector culture and most councils have whistleblowing policies as a mechanism to ensure there is a system in place where an individual feels that crimes have been committed or concealed.
22. Since the Public Interest and Disclosure Act 1998 came into force, the LGA has recommended that councils should develop local codes which seek to encourage individuals to blow the whistle and make their rights and duties clear when they do so. These codes should be capable of being extended to others outside direct council employment. The LGA has previously published advice for councils on the development of effective whistle blowing codes, and this will be refreshed over the coming months, incorporating any recommendations from Louise Casey's review of Rotherham, in the light of wider actions being taken to address the issue of child sexual exploitation.

Next steps

23. Members are asked to:

23.1 Note the report and the LGA's work around child sexual exploitation.

23.1 Comment on the work the Safer and Stronger Communities Board is undertaking as part of the LGA's action plan.

Financial Implications

24. There are no additional financial implications arising from this report for the Safer and Stronger Communities Board.