

# Agenda Item 47.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Child Exploitation</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 February 2021
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

Wokingham's Contextual Safeguarding approach, which involves key stakeholders from across the partnership working together to address the issue of Child Exploitation, is central to ensuring the safety of vulnerable young people and the wider child population in the local context.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the committee notes the report and comments on this.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

This report provides an overview regarding the issue of Child Exploitation and the Council's response to this through an approach known as Contextual Safeguarding. The strategic response to child exploitation, alongside the operational activity, are detailed.

## **Background**

### **What is Child Exploitation?**

Child Exploitation is a complex issue, which makes addressing it a complex task. There are similarities between different forms of exploitation and the criminal and sexual exploitation of children may be occurring simultaneously.

Please see excerpt below from the *Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit*, developed by the Home Office (2019) which sets out the definitions of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE):

*“Child sexual exploitation is not defined in law. Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology” (Home Office, 2019, p.3).*

*“Child Criminal Exploitation is not defined in law but is a term that has come to be associated with ‘county lines’.*

*County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of ‘deal line’. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.*

*Child criminal exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity:*

- *In exchange for something the victim needs or wants.*
- *For the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator.*
- *Through violence or the threat of violence.*

*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” (Home Office, 2019, p.3).*

### **What is Contextual Safeguarding?**

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach that seeks to understand and respond to young people’s experiences of significant harm outside of their families; the relationships that

young people develop in schools, the wider community and online can be exploitative in nature. Parents do not have a high degree of influence within these contexts and the exploitative relationships developed outside of the family negatively impact the parent-child relationship. In recognition of this, a Contextual Safeguarding approach encourages the engagement of professionals across a range of agencies, so that both the assessment of risk and subsequent interventions can be multi-faceted and influenced by those who can effect change in the extra-familial context.

## **Wokingham's Contextual Safeguarding Approach**

There are a variety of strategic and operational initiatives sitting across the Wokingham Borough that are targeted at supporting young people at risk of exploitation. Designed to understand and mitigate risk factors at an individual and community level through relationship based practice and disruption techniques, these services currently form Wokingham's Contextual Safeguarding response. They are underpinned by the principles set out in Wokingham's Child Exploitation Strategy, which is currently under review. A summary of the strategic initiatives and operational services are outlined as follows:

### **Strategic Response to Child Exploitation**

#### **Community Safety Partnership**

Wokingham Borough Council monitors anti-social behaviour through its Community Safety Partnership activities. This includes a specific partnership group that focuses on problem solving local issues such as direct engagement with young people and raising awareness of local activities to encourage more positive behaviours.

#### **Exploited and Missing Risk Assessment Conference**

Wokingham Children's Services chair and administer a multi-agency forum known as EMRAC (Exploited and Missing Risk Assessment Conference). The aim of this meeting is to ensure that young people who are at risk of exploitation or frequently missing are cited; and that multi-agency safeguarding plans are developed at a strategic level to reduce risk for both the individual and the wider youth population of Wokingham. Whilst this is a targeted provision, meaning that referrals are received via Social Care and the police, it does have a broader safeguarding agenda that benefits all children and young people in the Borough.

#### **Wokingham Exploitation Sub-Group**

The Wokingham Exploitation Sub-Group is a multi-agency meeting that involves key stakeholders in the delivery of exploitation responses from across the partnership. The meeting, held on a quarterly basis and chaired by the Assistant Director of Wokingham Children's Social Care, focuses on key data, trends and themes linked to exploitation, with a view to determining how they impact upon the development and delivery of services across Wokingham.

### *Pan Berkshire Child Exploitation Meeting*

Involving representatives from across the Berkshire Local Authorities, TVP and the Safeguarding Partnerships, this meeting explores trends, themes and practice on a Berkshire wide footprint, with a view to developing uniformity, promoting models of best practice and enhancing safeguarding responses.

### *Operational Response to Child Exploitation*

#### *Early Help provision*

Wokingham Children's Services offer Targeted 1:1 and family interventions through their Early Help provision. Access to this is determined via Early Help assessment and/step-down from Social Care and engagement is voluntary in nature. The service is also involved in the delivery of the Duke of Edinburgh Explorers Extreme programmes, which offer participants to opportunity to engage in constructive and positive activities and develop key life skills.

#### *Statutory Social Work Services*

Wokingham Children's Services support young people who are at risk of exploitation through Child in Need, Child Protection and Children in Care processes. An allocated Social Worker engages with the young person using relationship based practices and oversees a multi-agency plan designed to manage and mitigate risk.

#### *KICKS project/ Targeted KICKS project*

The KICKS project aims to create safer, stronger and more respectful communities, through supporting the social, emotional and educational development of young people.

Funded through Wokingham's Community Safety Partnership and run by Reading Football Club, the aim of the KICKS project is to engage hard to reach young people aged 11-19 years; all sessions are free. KICKS aim to give young people information that raises their awareness about how to keep themselves safe within the community and helps them make informed choices, now and later in life.

Reading Football Club also run a programme known as Targeted KICKS. This is funded via a grant from the Premier League and match funded by Wokingham Borough Council's Early Help service. The aim of the project to is to work with young people to help build resilience, develop positive role models and offer support to those who may be at risk of being drawn into youth violence. There are two tiers of provision, the first of these is targeted at those in Years 7-9 and the second targeted at those in Years 9-11. Referrals for Tier One provision are generated through the professional network, and referrals for Tier 2 through EMRAC. The latter can be in place for up to one year. The programme is also delivering educative interventions in three school settings across Wokingham Borough Council; these were identified in consultation and agreement with the EMRAC chair.

### Youth Mentoring

Wokingham Borough Council's Community Engagement Team mentors 15 young people a year between the ages of 11-18, who have been referred via the Early Help Hub. In addition, our Junior Warden programme continues to be a success with the Borough. The work of the Junior Wardens has included intergenerational project work with local sheltered housing residents, visiting PCSOs and litter picks.

### Positive Pathways Project

Delivered across five Wokingham Borough Council schools to students in years 6, 7 and 8, the Positive Pathways Programme targets children who are at risk of offending or who are already involved in offending behaviour. Schools provide a baseline in terms of presenting behaviours and success is measured throughout and at the completion of the project. Behaviours are also measured by the children themselves for up to twelve months following the completion of the project. Schools refer children to the programme and only those children who will positively engage with the project are accepted.

### Youth Offending Service (YOS)

The Youth Offending Service works with young people who have committed criminal offences with the aim of reducing the risk of re-offending, however prevention support is also offered to those who are at risk of offending. Referrals for prevention support are received via the Children's Services Early Help Hub.

YOS have also been involved in delivering educative programmes to groups of children in schools. This has included work in four secondary schools aimed at reducing violence and offending, along with targeted workshops for smaller groups of students.

In the 2020/2021 financial year, YOS launched a campaign to raise awareness amongst secondary school staff, students and the wider public about Child Exploitation, how to recognise the signs that it might be occurring and what supports are available to address this.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

*The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.*

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty
Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
<u>References</u>  1. Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit, Home Office, 2019.

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