Public Petitions Committee
Tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland

Written submission from East Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee

1. What barriers exist to identifying, disrupting or prosecuting child sexual exploitation (CSE) perpetrators? How might these be overcome?

East Renfrewshire has no direct experience of CSE activity. The introduction of “Operation Dash” from Police Scotland has meant a review of all case files to identify all vulnerable children and young people who may be at risk of CSE in our area. We acknowledge this as an increasingly noted area of concern.

An identified barrier may be that much of the focus to date has been on increasing the awareness of indicators to look for in children and young persons as victims and not on the identification of perpetrators. This has meant that for some time the activity of those sexually exploiting children and young people has continued unabated. Whilst the identification and disruption of perpetrators, groomers, recruiters and their networks might be considered as intelligence led police activity, this can be overcome by an equal focus on ensuring all partners are clear on what to look out for not only in relation to victims but also the individual sex offenders / perpetrators of CSE in our communities, as well as the networks in which they operate. Specific guidance would be helpful in this complex area, given the amount of challenges we have seen in gathering evidence and cases ever coming to court.

2. What difficulties exist around keeping looked-after children and young people (accommodated or at home) safe from CSE perpetrators? How might these be overcome?

Many recent enquiries relating to CSE have identified that children and young people (accommodated or at home) are amongst the most vulnerable in our communities. This is supported by a comprehensive list of vulnerabilities for children and young people who are more likely to become victims of CSE. Many children and young people live in complex households where basic needs are not being met. Difficulties exist because evidence shows that most children and young people who are targeted by the perpetrators of CSE are attracted to the lifestyle on offer where many needs appear to be met, specifically material and emotional needs in the early stages. These victims, who are often runaways or missing children, do not see always see themselves as victims. We need to ask more questions at the earliest point when a child or young person becomes “looked after”. This should be done through the GIRFEC Assessment Process where we ask specific questions relating to CSE.

“Operation Retriever” in Derbyshire noted that many of their looked after / accommodated young people were regularly going missing but this was not always reported by parents / carers. This heightens the risk to the young person considerably because “to be missing, you have to be missed”. We need to educate children and families about the risks.
Recent publications including “I thought I was the only one, the only one in the world” by the Children’s Commissioner in England outline the complex nature of CSE and the challenges faced for most agencies now becoming aware of, or acting upon allegations of CSE in local communities.

Services require to be equipped to best understand the scale and nature of CSE and what to look out for / how to respond. This has improved recently with the introduction of Operation Dash by Police Scotland.

3. What types of training has your organisation had on ways of identifying, disrupting and CSE prosecuting perpetrators?

The Lead Officer Child Protection for East Renfrewshire CPC visited Derbyshire some time ago and was involved in specific learning from the enquiry “Operation Retriever”, and supported by offender profile training from CEOP, has created presentations, guidance, information leaflets, staff briefings, workshops and training, for staff / volunteers across all agencies. Whilst available to all CPC partners within East Renfrewshire, targeted training has also begun in specific areas such as Education and Sexual Health clinics. This has increased staff knowledge in this subject area in relation to identification and disrupting activity by referral. This is however limited to the amount of information being provided in describing this group. There has been no training in relation to the area of prosecution to date.

4. If you have experienced an example of good practice in relation to any of these questions, please describe it for us.

We would regard our current response in tackling CSE as answered at point 3 as a robust start in a fast developing area. This includes the identification of a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in East Renfrewshire who liaises with Police based on activities relating to “Operation Dash”. We continue to discuss the issue at National meetings for both Child Protection Committee Chairs and Lead Officers, we also provide staff briefings to multi-agency partners across the CPC, have distributed information leaflets, handouts and have purchased appropriate resources and have begun to consider how we get the messages out to children and young people too.

**Giving Evidence**

East Renfrewshire Child Protection Committee would not be willing to give oral evidence to the Public Petitions Committee

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May 2013