Public Petitions Committee
Tackling child sexual exploitation in Scotland

Written submission from Dumfries and Galloway Child Protection Committee

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

Identifying:
The identification of CSE remains a complex matter. CSE can take many forms. The barriers which exist are in the challenge of recognising CSE in the forms in which it emerges. In Dumfries & Galloway, the problem manifests itself differently than that of some areas in the wider UK. The challenge is to promote the identification of CSE in its wider context and gain a fuller understanding of the many aspects for which there is a need to be understood and respond.

Disrupting:
To disrupt CSE it needs to be identified. Therefore some of the challenges above – awareness, identification and location of CSE need to be overcome. Both Police and Social Work systems need to be able to communicate in order to target the areas where intelligence leads to suspicion that CSE is a problem.

CSE often involves wide networks of perpetrators over wide geographical areas. Significant Police and Social Work capacity is required to identify and disrupt CSE activity and to pursue lines of enquiry which arise from such activity.

Prosecuting:
The prosecution of CSE requires good quality evidence and robust systems of victim and witness support. It also requires a facility to promote and receive public information which directs prosecutors to further sources of evidence and potential witnesses.

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

As a ‘corporate parent’ the challenges in respect of accommodated children, and children looked after at home, are similar. There is a balance between good robust parenting, and allowing children and young people to grow and develop. As parents, knowledge and vigilance are key to helping protect children. The use of social media and technology has become central aspects of CSE and this area continues to develop at a rate of change. One of the difficulties for parents is to keep with the pace of change, and how Social media is used in the grooming of potential CSE ‘victims’.

An increased knowledge of how CSE manifests itself is key to identifying the problem at an earlier stage. As children grow older, they seek independence. Parents and workers need the vigilance and the knowledge to help keep children
safe and one of the difficulties is around education, and appropriate and clear boundaries and supervision.

In terms of education, a difficulty has been the capacity to ensure awareness raising within schools, and directly with children and young people.

One of the ways that the above difficulties can be overcome is by, initially at a strategic level, ensuring that areas have a comprehensive and planned approach to education and awareness raising with staff/workers, children and young people and their parents. This is a proactive approach to CSE at a number of levels.

**What barriers exist to combating perpetrators’ use of online/Social media? How might these be overcome?**

Barriers include:

- The threat of online grooming which originates from outwith the UK
- The anonymous nature of online activity

The use of social media in CSE can begin to be overcome by:

- Supporting the IT world to develop better ways to help keep people safe
- More sophisticated ways of identifying the location of perpetrators where grooming is identified
- More robust default privacy settings on social media sites.

**What types of training has your organisation had on ways of identifying, disrupting or prosecuting CSE perpetrators?**

Key staff members have recently attended two CSE events in Scotland. There is a plan to roll out awareness raising events across our local CPC area later in 2013.

**Good practice**

We are in the early stages of the local strategic response to CSE but have delivered general ‘keeping safe’ awareness raising through schools and CEOP Ambassadors.

At a practice level, Dumfries and Galloway has worked with a small number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young women (and possibly one young man), giving their stated ages as 16 plus who have show indicators of being trafficked for sexual exploitation, or have been in touch with other young people who are being sexually exploited.

We have worked closely with the Scottish Refugee Council, the Guardianship Service, the Home Office and the police as well as other LA SW departments in order to try to keep them safe. There is an ongoing debate as to whether or not these young people should come under the Children’s Hearing system to ensure their safety through legislation, however, given the known circumstances around
trafficking, these young people are usually more concerned about the safety and well-being of their own families.

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