

Real voices: Coffey report on child sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester

Date 20 November 2014
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Summary

The inquiry into child sexual exploitation, chaired by Ann Coffey, MP for Stockport (and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults) has published its report. Under the title *Real Voices*, the report give prominence to the voice of children and young people as the inquiry looked at what changes have been made in safeguarding children from sexual exploitation since the Rochdale grooming case, and what more needs to be done.

The focus of the report is Greater Manchester. However, the report contains a number of recommendations. A few are for the national government but many will be useful for local authorities as they consider their response with other local agencies to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and improving the safeguarding of children. This briefing will be of use to lead members and officers with responsibility for children's services and their colleagues in the police, health and voluntary sector, and young people in raising awareness of the issue.

Overview

The inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Greater Manchester, chaired by Ann Coffey, MP for Stockport and Chair of the Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults, has published its report, *Real Voices*. The inquiry was commissioned in December 2013 by Tony Lloyd, Police and Crime Commissioner for Greater Manchester, to look at the changes made in safeguarding children from sexual exploitation by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and partner agencies since the 2012 Rochdale sexual grooming case, and at what more needs to be done in the future.

Ann Coffey said, "One of the key issues in the Rochdale case was the failure of police and partner agencies to listen properly to young victims and their families and to adequately respond to them... It is clear that victims in Rochdale and elsewhere were not identified or taken seriously because of negative and discriminatory attitudes of the police and other partner agencies towards them. Their behaviour was seen as a life style choice and because of that they were not seen as vulnerable children and were not given the protection they should have expected from organisations with a responsibility to safeguard them. I will be focusing on how far these attitudes and cultures within organisations have changed and at what barriers still remain to be overcome. How much better are the police and other agencies at identifying risk of child sexual exploitation at an early stage and preventing harm coming to children, particularly when they runaway or go missing?"

In her Foreword, Ann Coffey writes: 'I have prioritised listening to children and young people in this inquiry. I want to let their unaltered, authentic voices shine out. Young people themselves hold the

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information about what is happening to them. All we need to do is listen... They reveal better than any dry statistics the scale of the problem we, and they, are up against.'

Briefing in full

The report's first chapter, *Real voices*, comprises a series of illuminating accounts of the range of issues experienced by children and young people who contributed to the inquiry. This is followed by chapters on: What is child sexual exploitation?; Changes in Greater Manchester Police post-Rochdale; Community engagement; The role of schools; Children who are missing from school; Children who are missing from home and care; Health; Justice; People who commit sexual offences; and New ways of working. Each chapter leads to a number of recommendations; key points and a selection of recommendations with wider application are outlined below.

References are made to two projects:

- Project Phoenix, which was set up post-Rochdale to develop a cross-boundary multi-agency response to CSE across the whole of Greater Manchester, so that victims receive the same standard of response regardless of where they live
- the Sunrise team, a dedicated multi-agency team which became fully operational in 2010 to tackle CSE in Rochdale.

Real voices

The accounts in this chapter cover a range of issues, as experienced by children and young people and in their own words, including: unwanted approaches in the street; relations with the police; pressures and social media; peer mentors (very positively); young parenthood; sexual exploitation, and giving evidence; boys' views on relationships with girls.

What is child sexual exploitation?

Key points include:

- the exploitation of children has been around for many years; it is not new
- there has been a significant shift from talking about child prostitution to child protection
- what is defined as child sexual exploitation is critical, because unless the agencies charged with the protection of our children from CSE can articulate what CSE is and explain it, then the public will not understand either. The fundamental basis of any communication must be clarity of the message [The National Working Group network's [definition](#) of CSE is used in government guidance and policy, and has been very widely adopted]
- GMP figures on recorded sexual offences for under-18-year-olds between 1 June 2013 and 31 May 2014 show that only 111 cases out of 1,691 were 'flagged' on the police computer as child sexual exploitation. 'In my [Ann Coffey's] view this indicates an under identification of the extent of CSE'
- the most well-known model, because it tends to receive the most media coverage, is by organised gangs or groups. This is where abuse is carried out by more than one adult and can involve multiple victims... there is often a perception that CSE is only about vulnerable white girls being exploited by gangs of Asian men. This isn't the case... 'On my visit to the Rochdale Sunrise CSE team, they told me that only 15 per cent of their cases involved gangs and groups, with the other 85 per cent being single offenders. This is supported by figures given to us in June by GMP for all their police divisions, which reveal that 10.34 per

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cent of crimes currently being investigated involved multiple offenders, with the remaining being single perpetrators'

- a child, for these purposes, is a young person under 18.

Recommendations include the removal of all references to child prostitution from legislation, and the inclusion of 'boys and young men' in all literature in strategic responses to CSE.

Changes in Greater Manchester Police post-Rochdale

Key points include:

- GMP say that what seems to be a low level of flagging [of CSE cases amongst recorded sexual offences for under-18s] could be because current and historical familial sexual abuse, crimes committed by strangers and peer-on-peer offences are not being flagged as CSE. It also may reflect that GMP are still in the process of training and developing officers' understanding of CSE ('We are certainly not fully aware of the extent and forms of CSE... particularly in relation to the sexual exploitation of boys and young men')
- a new system for keeping track of every piece of intelligence passed to the police relating to CSE was introduced in 2013; in the 10 months to January 2014, GMP received 2,286 pieces of intelligence from sources including members of the public, observations from police officers, children's services, schools and other agencies – almost one third from Rochdale, possibly reflecting a high level of awareness because of the work done following the court case
- the report includes area data from the LSCBs – but, disappointingly, only six of the ten provided figures in response to a request
- Project Phoenix – which only became fully functional in January 2014 (over a year after being proposed) – has recently launched a campaign, [It's not OKAY](#), and has developed a tool for measuring the level of risk of CSE to a young person, which is meant to be completed with the young person and will be used by all specialist CSE teams in Greater Manchester (available on the campaign website)
- GMP have produced draft guidance for Community Safety Partnerships aimed at disrupting CSE by targeting business premises
- despite significant spending cuts, the number of specialist CSE officers has been increased from 19 to 39 since June 2013.

Recommendations include CSE training for *all* response officers (so far it has reached only 21%) and for all Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), who are 'walking their neighbourhood' (but who do not currently receive such training); making use of schemes like Neighbourhood and Home Watch to inform the community about CSE.

Community engagement

Key points include:

- people see things, but often don't fully understand what is happening. Communities are often the best source of intelligence and information about children at risk of CSE, but people need to understand better what to look for, what grooming is and how it operates
- it is important to give communities information about CSE in their local areas; if offenders are portrayed in a particular way (eg. Asian males) then the signs will be missed in people who don't fit that image, and so will the opportunity to protect children

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- while large children's charities do much excellent work with young people at risk of CSE, there are many small, local groups which reach young people
- involving and informing businesses where risky contacts and connections are often made, such as takeaway food outlets, taxi drivers, shops and hotels is important (eg, through campaigns like [Say something if you see something](#))
- Anne Coffey visited the Council of Mosques in Rochdale, and found them concerned that, after recent media coverage, they are seen as part of the problem not part of the solution; mosques provide a good opportunity to raise awareness of CSE amongst the children and young people who attend
- it is important to develop communications to reach the full range of different communities; to prevent CSE, cultural attitudes must be tackled, including a better understanding of consent and exploitative relationships.

Recommendations include: finding more effective ways to engage with different communities; providing more information to the public, as well as to those who are the 'eyes and ears' of the community.

The role of schools

Key points include:

- schools have a very important role in giving children and young people information, so that they can protect themselves from harmful relationships; this is part of their broader safeguarding role, set out in [statutory guidance](#) and [inspected](#) by Ofsted
- there is huge variation in the information provided by schools: some fear that a proactive approach to CSE might cause reputational damage; others make excellent use of a range of available resources, and/or create their own
- young people report feeling a lot of pressure to grow up as soon as they go to secondary school; primary schools have a major role in helping to prepare them for this – they are also an excellent place to raise awareness of CSE amongst parents (with whom they have good contact)
- the Pupil Premium can be (and has been) used to good effect with vulnerable young people to help build self-confidence – which helps to protect them from harm and improve educational attainment; 'there needs to be a sea change in attitudes so that we don't simply see child protection as an add-on but see it as fundamental to educational achievement'
- peer mentoring was frequently highlighted as a valuable bridge between young people and agencies such as the police, social services and schools.

Recommendations include continuing a campaign to make PHSE compulsory on the curriculum, and making use of the Pupil Premium to fund peer-mentoring schemes for those at risk of CSE.

Children who are missing from school

Key points include:

- children going missing from school can be a sign of CSE, and those being educated off-site are of particular concern; Ofsted's 2010 survey, [Children missing from education](#), warned that 'Children and young people who are not receiving education and whose whereabouts are unknown may be particularly at risk of physical, emotional and psychological harm', and its 2013 report, [Pupils missing out on education](#) (about pupils not in full-time education at

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school), includes the observation from HMCI Sir Michael Wilshaw that, 'If no-one in authority knows what education these children and young people receive each week, or whether they even attend, they not only miss out on education but can be vulnerable to abuse. Everyone must take greater responsibility for knowing where they are.' Inspectors now ask for data on this as part of the SIF inspections of children's social care.

Children who are missing from home and care

Key points include:

- one in five children and young people who go missing from home or care are at risk of serious harm; there are major concerns about the links between children running away and risks of CSE (figure prepared for the inquiry by GMP show 3,242 children and young people under 18 went missing from January to mid-September 2014 in Greater Manchester, generating 9,789 reports; of those, 539 were children looked after by local authorities, generating 4,520 reports)
- despite a requirement that children's homes which accept young people from out of their borough notify their LA of children admitted or discharged from the home, it is clear that this is not happening as it should
- LSCBs have an important role in monitoring and interrogating data on children who go missing, who must be offered a return interview to try and find out the causes and the level of risk to which they might have been exposed.

Recommendations include spot checks on children's homes to see if they are notifying police and the LA when a child moves into the home who may be at risk of CSE; and care provision for 16- and 17-year-olds should be inspected by Ofsted.

Health

Key points include:

- the impact of CSE on children's and young people's physical and mental health is massive, yet victims often have long waits for CAMHS services
- voluntary organisations which provide sexual health and education services are often able to gain the trust of young people who do not feel able to speak to authority or to disclose information to agencies which are there to protect them.

Recommendations include making CSE a priority Public Health issue, to help develop a more strategic approach; further research should be undertaken on the availability of counselling services for victims of CSE and those at risk; joint commissioning arrangements for CSE, sexual assault, rape and domestic abuse support services should be considered.

Justice

Key points include:

- only a small proportion of offenders actually got to court, and only half of those were convicted; new, and welcome, measures to give extra support to victims in court should help – and the new joint CPS-police rape action plan outlines the need for police and prosecutors to focus their cases on the behaviour of the accused not the complainant

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- there is a distorted perception of how a vulnerable child appears (wide-eyed, needy), but the reality may be behaviour (perhaps anger or violence) which reflects the abuse they are experiencing; we need a better understanding of how vulnerability is exhibited
- the long delays in getting some cases to court place a high cost on victims/witnesses, and often leave perpetrators free to continue offending.

Recommendations include: a review of recent 'No Further Action' cases, to identify areas for learning and training; further research into the disparity between the number of recorded sexual offences against children and the number of prosecutions and convictions; the CPS should be part of CSE multi-agency teams; there should be a review of the type of questioning and the tone of cross-examination by defence barristers in child sexual abuse cases.

People who commit sexual offences

Key points include:

- in Greater Manchester there has been a 41% increase in the number of registered sexual offenders over the last seven years. Many offenders are likely to have shown an interest in children by the time they are 13; we need to understand the warning signs and make appropriate early interventions with children who are at risk of developing sexual offending behaviour, and to know more about the pathways that lead to sexual offending
- CSE by groups of men is a small proportion of overall CSE; the majority of cases involve single offenders
- it is suggested that sexual assaults are under-reported in some communities because of the shame it is felt to bring on the victim and the victim's family.

Recommendations include: in serious case reviews (SCRs), looking not only at what happened to the child but also (in terms of future prevention) at the history of the abuser; incorporating information about the behaviour of people who sexually offend into training and awareness-raising about CSE.

New ways of working

Key points include:

- LAs and the police 'are operating in a daunting financial climate', with significant cuts in service budgets at a time when the level of need is high – so we need new ways of working across boundaries to fight CSE, involving the wider community, parents and young people themselves
- it is important, when services are commissioned, that vulnerability is considered holistically (as in the Troubled Families model).

Recommendations include: the appointment of a CSE Champion with a specific remit to develop new models of working across police and local authority boundaries in partnership with the voluntary sector, young people, communities and parent groups to better protect young people at risk of CSE; more pooling of budgets to better safeguard children at risk of CSE (eg. through detached youth workers).

Comment

The report's executive summary begins, 'Our society is currently undergoing a profound shock as it learns about the huge number of children who have been victims of child sexual exploitation...'

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Rochdale, along with children and young people who have been sexually abused in Rotherham, Derby, Oldham and Oxford and later in Stockport and Peterborough, was a deafening wake-up call that pricked our collective conscience.' Launching the report, Ms Coffey said, "My observations will make painful reading for those who hoped that Rochdale was an isolated case. This is a real and ongoing problem. I have been concerned about the number of people who have told me that in some neighbourhoods child sexual exploitation had become the new social norm. This social norm has perhaps been fuelled by the increased sexualisation of children and young people and an explosion of explicit music videos and the normalisation of quasi-pornographic images."

Welcoming the report, Tony Lloyd (who commissioned it) said it was 'a catalyst for real change that we cannot ignore. We all have a responsibility to act and the time to do that is now'; he described the report as thorough and well-researched, adding that 'its findings are important, not just for Greater Manchester, but for across our land'.

What is described as the report's 'Central Recommendation' is for the establishment (in Manchester) of a 'young people led multimedia digital network, including a high-profile weekly radio show produced and hosted by young people on CSE-related issues'. Plans appear to be well advanced, with the formation of a consortium of charities to support the project – which will be run in partnership with [Unity Radio](#) (a youth station) and linked to social media and online support. This is an ambitious and innovative project, and it will be interesting to see the impact it has.

Although specifically focused on Greater Manchester, Ms Coffey's report raises many issues which are – or should be – of far wider concern. There is a real danger that the high-profile cases of gang-related grooming will lead many to perceive – wrongly – that CSE is something which happens 'somewhere else'. As this report makes clear, most cases involve individual offenders, from all backgrounds and in all types of community. Recognising that is part of the 'sea change in attitudes' the report says is needed.

External links

[Real voices: Coffey report](#)

Related briefings

[Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham – Alexis Jay report](#) (September 2014)

[If only someone had listened – OCC Inquiry into CSE in gangs and groups](#) (December 2013)

[Child sexual exploitation and the response to localised grooming](#) (August 2013)

[Sexual exploitation of children – Rochdale Safeguarding Children Board Review](#) (October 2012)

[Tackling child sexual exploitation and protecting children who go missing from residential care](#) (August 2012)

Further CSN Policy Briefings are being prepared on the Ofsted survey [The sexual exploitation of children: it couldn't happen here, could it?](#) and the separate reports of the Commons Home Affairs and Communities and Local Government Committees

For further information, please visit www.lgiu.org.uk or email john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk