

COUNCIL: 27 NOVEMBER 2014

EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN & FAMILIES STATEMENT

AGENDA ITEM: 6

Following the questions raised by Cllr Walker at last month's Council concerning Child Sexual Exploitation, I wanted to take this opportunity make a further statement on this crucial issue.

First of all I wanted to say how much I welcome the interest shown by members on this issue, not only because it is a key priority for me, but because it provides us all with the opportunity to remind ourselves that Child Sexual Exploitation, or any form of child abuse, is the business of all agencies, professionals, council employees and members in this chamber. Members have a particularly important role to play as the eyes and ears of the community, where our surgeries and local ward networks enable us to be alert to the early signs of emerging safeguarding concerns. It might simply be that you notice patterns of behaviour in a given area that are worrying you or it might be something more definite about a particular child. If you do have concerns of this nature, I can reassure you that children's services or the police will be pleased to advise you of what course of action might be appropriate.

Meanwhile however, I also wanted to put you in the picture regarding our current state of readiness in Cardiff, to respond to any emerging patterns of child sexual exploitation or to respond to cases of concern. Before I do that it is important to emphasise that those involved in child sexual exploitation go to great lengths to conceal their activity. For that reason it is a largely hidden issue which we need to flush out and confront. This takes me to the first point about the current position.

- We need to do much more to understand how and where exploitative adults operate in Cardiff. The latest police intelligence does not indicate that there are gangs of men organising together in the way that was characteristic in Rotherham or Oxfordshire. The fact that we haven't discovered this sort of organised activity doesn't mean however, that it isn't happening in Cardiff and the fact that it has surfaced elsewhere in Wales means that we need to do more to strengthen and gather intelligence locally. As I indicated earlier there is a key role for members here.
- There have been some particularly serious cases of predatory individuals grooming naive and vulnerable young women to lure them into sexually abusive situations but I am pleased to say that last year Cardiff city social workers were directly instrumental in the arrest and conviction of one particularly dangerous man. In these and similar

cases, all professionals on the ground with responsibility for child protection are highly proactive and act without hesitation to intervene; they do so swiftly, in collaboration with each other and are supported by good protocols and systems.

- It is for these reasons and learning the lessons emerging from Rochdale and Oxfordshire that the Cardiff and Vale Local Safeguarding Children Board made CSE its first priority early in 2014.
- The last twelve months have seen a number of initiatives taken to enable us to address CSE in Cardiff and these include the establishment of a Cardiff and Vale CSE Forum led by a senior police officer and actively sponsored by the Police and Crime Commissioner. This forum has been undertaking a lot of the strategic thinking and planning needed to strengthen intelligence gathering, coordination and policy and included an awareness raising conference for City social workers and other professionals held in early 2014. A members' Human Trafficking Enquiry also reported earlier this year setting out some important findings about the relationship between human trafficking and CSE.
- Finally it is worth noting that the May 2014 CSSIW Report of the Inspection of Safeguarding for Looked After Children provided a high level of reassurance that children's services staff are proactive in safeguarding looked after children who engage in risk taking behavior or who are vulnerable and that the picture is an improving one overall.

Although I am reassured overall by the determination of individual social workers and managers in Cardiff and can see strong signs of good interagency strategic development, I have also become acutely conscious of the need for us all to substantially strengthen our approach. It seems to me that we are at a crossroads. I say this because I have not long returned from the annual conference of Directors of Children's Services in Manchester. One of the key preoccupations of the conference was CSE and I took away three key messages from the debates I heard. These were

Firstly, that we need to think beyond the limits of Cardiff and develop a Wales wide or at the very least a South Wales Strategy, stretching along the whole of M4 corridor as a minimum. If CSE is prevalent in the Cardiff area, then it is known to be highly mobile along major highways.

Secondly, that effective measures to tackle emergent patterns, require agencies to combine forces on the ground in well resourced multi-disciplinary teams; we saw some very good examples of best practice at the conference, based on this kind of model. No one agency has the skills or the answer. This is not something that can be bolted onto the day job - it requires specialists working closely together.

Thirdly that we need to do much more to raise public awareness and in particular to equip and empower young people with the knowledge and support to recognise the signs and to provide them with good access to ways of stopping it when it threatens.

I am advised by the Director of Children's Services that a senior meeting of key decision makers is taking place this week - the South Wales Safeguarding Forum, led at Assistant Chief Constable level and that this meeting will be focusing on our capacity and readiness in relation to CSE in South Wales. The

meeting will be considering self-assessments recently completed by each LSCB, based on a nationally validated tool, to ascertain the level of interagency effectiveness and to agree what steps need to be taken to strengthen collaboration and intervention strategically and on the ground.

I intend to update members further on these developments in the near future. I have also asked the Monitoring Officer and the Director to commission the development of a clear protocol for all members which will set out clear advice about the route for raising safeguarding concerns in general and for making specific child-related referrals in particular so that you are better supported to play your part in safeguarding in the community; the draft protocol will be finalized in consultation with Group Leaders. Meanwhile I would encourage you all to sign up for the programme of children services and social care briefings for members that will be run in 2015/16 to support your awareness and understanding of a range of complex issues and Child sexual exploitation in particular. Further information about this programme will be circulated to you all.

COUNCILLOR SUE LENT

Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member (Early Years, Children & Families)