

Child Exploitation

JSNA Report

December 2015

This report

This report has been prepared jointly by Knowsley Council, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and partners of the Knowsley Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB).

Its purpose is to provide an analysis of **Child Exploitation** in order to determine the following:

- How much impact does this issue have on local people?
- Can this impact be reduced through local action?
- Can local action reduce health inequalities?
- Will local action on this help address other issues too?

Understanding these things helps the HWB determine the level of priority that this issue should be given in the Borough's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

This is one of a series of reports that comprise Knowsley's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

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Further information

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Contents

	Page
Introduction	
Purpose of this report and what it covers and does not cover	4
Quality of data and intelligence available	5
Why Child Exploitation is important	6
Links to other priorities, and interdependencies with Council, CCG and wider Partnership priorities and strategies	9
Impact on Knowsley residents	
The number and characteristics of people affected by this issue; the key trends in recent years, and expected future direction of travel	10
How residents, communities, and stakeholders view this issue and impact on life experiences	24
The scale of health and other inequalities	
Comparison with national and regional averages and statistical neighbours	25
Current service provision and actions	
Asset assessment – people, facilities, funding, and other resources	28
How expected trends are likely to impact on service provision	29
Evidence of what works locally and elsewhere	29

Child Exploitation

Introduction

Purpose of this report and what it covers and does not cover

The purpose of the Child Exploitation JSNA is to bring together intelligence on child exploitation in Knowsley, focusing on:

- Child sexual exploitation
- Child criminal exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is:

“The sexual exploitation of children and young people under 18 involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example being persuaded to post sexual images on the Internet/mobile phones without immediate payment or gain. In all cases, those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.”

There is not currently a recognised national definition for child criminal exploitation, but the National Crime Agency describes a:

“growing body of intelligence...that vulnerable young people are being exploited in order to facilitate the running of street level drug dealing”.

To further define criminal exploitation in Knowsley, it can be understood as the *“exploitation of children and young people aged under-18 in the storage, distribution and selling of illegal drugs, under violent coercion or exploited through the use of debt, or promise of cash or drugs.”*

Child exploitation is an emerging area of practice and it is necessary to understand and review the needs of those affected; focusing on the children being exploited, but also considering the needs of

their family and friends, communities and schools. Reviewing needs in the future will ensure that we are developing practices and commissioning services and interventions that are effective and sustainable in supporting children and families. Child exploitation is an important safeguarding matter, and as a potential criminal and unlawful act there are several agencies who are engaged in providing services to victims of exploitation.

The report does not look at other forms of exploitation, and issues such as trafficking, and it is only concerned with those aged under 18. There remains a significant gap both in terms of services and intelligence on those young people who are aged 18 and over who are exploited in similar ways. When considering the criminal exploitation, there is evidence that young people have continued to engage in drug related criminality beyond the age of 18 (that is, those who have been exploited as children and have continued this pattern, through coercion or choice as adults) and as a result are now serving prison sentences for drugs offences as adults.

Quality of data and intelligence available

With child exploitation, there are likely to be considerable amounts of hidden exploitation that is not being reported to either the police or children's services. As with domestic violence and hate crimes, exploitation has not been consistently reported in the past, and should be understood within this context. It is expected that the numbers of cases that come into children's services will increase over the next 12-months, as a greater understanding of child exploitation is embedded in practices. In particular, there are relatively low rates of male children being sexually exploited, especially among those who identify as heterosexual.

Child exploitation is not new, but there has been a shift in the understanding of exploitation, in particular child sexual exploitation. Previous perceptions of child prostitution or perceiving the child as the problem, have been replaced with a greater understanding of these behaviours as abuse. This means that much of the information and intelligence is current and there is not a baseline of information to work from and to understand trends and prevalence. There is an imperative to continually monitor and understand how patterns change relating to child exploitation so that comparisons can be made in the future.

Knowsley Council is working alongside Merseyside Police and Merseyside local authorities to bring together a more comprehensive understanding of CSE across the Merseyside footprint. A national dataset is being established currently and in the future wider comparisons should be possible. However, comparison is only robust against other Merseyside authorities currently. For criminal exploitation, Knowsley Council is at the vanguard of research in this area, and although there is ongoing work nationally, it is not currently possible to compare prevalence data with other authorities.

The cohorts of children who have been exploited over the last 12-months comprise a relatively small proportion of the overall child population in Knowsley. This means that it is often difficult to assign numbers to some of the trends and characteristics, to protect the anonymity of the children concerned.

Why is Child Exploitation important?

Knowsley has a high prevalence of the risk factors identified by the Home Office in understanding child exploitation, including high levels of missing from home and care, evidence of mental ill health and high levels of school absences. Child exploitation exposes children, who are often already vulnerable, to considerable serious risks, both in the long and short term. The impact of child exploitation also poses significant risks to the stability of families, to friends, and their communities including schools.

The impacts of exploitation are significant and wide ranging:

(1) Vulnerable children are targeted:

- There is considerable evidence that in Knowsley those children targeted are amongst the most vulnerable children. Children looked after are disproportionately represented in the child sexual exploitation cohort. Children looked after account for approximately 1% of Knowsley's child population, and in the last six months children looked after have accounted for 34% of all children taken to MACSE (multi-agency child sexual exploitation meetings). This is particularly relevant to children living in residential homes placed in the Knowsley area by other local authorities
- Children with Special Educational Needs have been targeted as part of the criminal exploitation of children, with 16% of the known cohort having SEN statements. National research indicates the link between those young people at risk of CSE and also defined as having SEN
- Children who have been exploited have often had Adverse Childhood Experiences, making them less resilient and more likely to be at risk of exploitation.
- Children and young people who are at risk of or have been exploited do not always recognise their own vulnerability, or the impact of their behaviours, particularly in regards to social media and their increasing vulnerability.

(2) Increased risks experienced by victims of exploitation:

- Criminal exploitation cases are becoming more serious; there have been more arrests for Class A incidents in the last 18-months than previously.
- This increase in transactions related to Class A drugs has the potential to expose exploited young people to even more dangers. Class A drugs are more expensive so any corresponding debts (if drugs/cash are confiscated by police or stolen by 'customers') will be higher and take longer to pay off than debts relating to cannabis.
- There are some inherent dangers for these young people in selling the drugs. The evidence shows that some of the young people caught distributing drugs are found with weapons; presumably for protection against any threats they may face from 'customers'. An increase in Class A distribution could increase the threats of violence to these vulnerable young people, or even place them in a position where they use violence against another person to protect themselves.
- Children who have been sexually exploited have faced considerable risks, in terms of sexual and physical assault, and use of alcohol and drugs.
- There is an imperative to address the problems of exploitation while the children are still under-18. Turning 18 does not reduce the vulnerability to exploitation, but it does mean that there will be fewer services available to support and intervene, and for criminal exploitation the consequences in terms of the justice system can be far greater.

(3) Long term health impacts:

- Victims of CSE are at risk of being exposed to **sexually transmitted infections**, including Chlamydia. Teenage pregnancy and terminations of pregnancies are also common in the cohort of children who have been sexually exploited in Knowsley. As highlighted by the Children's Commissioner, children who have experienced sexual abuse are more vulnerable to becoming victims of CSE which increasing their risks in terms of sexual infections or pregnancies [For more information on sexual health in Knowsley – please refer to the Sexual Health JSNA.](#)
- **Substance abuse** and the effects of drugs on children and young people are significant for all children exposed to exploitation. Drugs and alcohol are often used as a gift or payment for those who are being exploited. With those children who have been criminally exploited, the overwhelming majority are cannabis users, and cannabis use is one of the main entry routes for becoming involved in criminal exploitation. In CSE cases cannabis, highs, and cocaine are common especially among the older teenagers who have been sexually exploited; these are used as gifts and also to control the children by the exploiters. Substance abuse can be a long-term problem for those who have been victims of exploitation, using drugs or alcohol in an attempt to relieve their emotional suffering. [For more information on the prevalence of substance abuse in Knowsley please see Substance Abuse JSNA.](#)
- Carrying drugs on or within their bodies can also have fatal consequences for children, especially if they arrested with the drugs concealed within their bodies. Threats of violence and increased debts to the exploiters can make the children reluctant to admit to carrying the drugs.
- **Physical injury** this can include injuries inflicted as part of sexual abuse, or physical injuries inflicted on the children by their exploiter, especially in terms of criminal exploitation where the threat of violence is omnipresent in interactions between victims and exploiters. Threats of violence and retribution are often made to their families and friends also.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder** – children who are being or have been exploited, are highly likely to experience feelings of anxiety, stress or fear so severe as to be known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Those children who have been exploited have often been treated violently, through physical harm or threats and coercion, and sexual assaults can commonly be the cause of PTSD.
- **Mental ill health** can manifest in self-harm, depression, personality disorders, sleep-disorders, eating disorders, and can lead to suicide attempts. These problems can be present in children before they are exploited and can be exacerbated by exploitation, but mental health issues can also be caused by the exploitation and the associated experiences. These can last into adulthood and impact upon future generations of children in Knowsley.

(4) Impacts on relationships:

- Child exploitation can often cause fractures in relationships between the victim and their family, as they begin to identify more with their exploiter.
- Recent exploitation cases in Knowsley have resulted in children being taken in to care, with parents not being confident in their ability to keep their child safe. Exploitation and the characteristics that are associated with exploitation (such as missing episodes), has contributed to increased pressures on families.
- Impacts upon the family are significant; social workers who have worked directly with families affected by exploitation describe that parents go through a grieving process for their children; their child has had very adult experiences including sexual and drug experiences, and to deal with this they experience grief for their perceived loss of a young child.
- With younger victims of exploitation there can be an imperative to support the family to ensure that exploitation does not reoccur as the child becomes older, and there is a need to

understand the impact on exploitation on siblings to ensure that they are protected from the external threat of exploitation. With the criminal exploitation cohort of children, we see that having older siblings or family members involved in criminality or Organised Gangs increases the vulnerability to exploitation.

- Child criminal exploitation can cause significant problems for families, with threats to their safety made by exploiters to coerce their victims. With involvement with Organised Criminal Gangs, there are inherent threats and risks for these young people and their families.
- National research has found that children who are exploited can themselves become exploiters as they become adults. Exploitative relationships are normalised for some children, and as they have engaged in adult relationships they have followed these patterns.
- Healthy sexual relationships, those young people who have been victims of exploitation (especially those who have witnessed domestic violence in their home environment) assume that violence and sexual violence is normal and inevitable – this normalisation also leads to under-reporting.

(5) Impact on the community

- There is evidence that exploitation can spread within friendship and peer groups – both in sexual and criminal exploitation.
- Peer pressure and the superficial glamour of both experiences of exploitation can be attractive to young people – for example, having cash to be able to buy new clothes or to spend on cannabis can be attractive for young people, especially if one of their friends is already having these experiences.
- Children who have been exploited can be treated as a threat within their community and marginalised – leading to greater identification with their exploiter or within a gang.
- For children who are known to have been criminally exploited, 72% have had engagement with school attendance services. Exploitation impacts on the overall education of children, in particular their attendance and subsequent attainment. [For more information on the wider issues relating to attendance and attainment, please see Attendance and Attainment JSNA.](#)

The consequences of exploitation are massive and wide-ranging, and the number of services who will provide interventions and services to these children and their families is significant. As with issues such as domestic violence, when a child is identified as being a victim of or at risk of exploitation, they will need immediate protective interventions, but may also require longer term support from a variety of agencies, including universal services such as health and education, but also specialist targeted provision including mental health, counselling and sexual health services.

Exploitation is not a homogenous issue, and different levels of exploitation and different forms of exploitation are present in Knowsley currently. This means that agencies, from those who provide universal services to those that are supplying bespoke and individual care for children, will need to be able to prevent, respond to and intervene at different levels of exploitation. All organisations in Knowsley that engage with children and families are required by the KSCB to understand the threats relating to child exploitation and how to identify the risks.

Links to other priorities, and interdependencies with Council, CCG and wider Partnership priorities and strategies

Exploitation is one of the main priorities for the Knowsley Safeguarding Children Board, and significant levels of resources have been dedicated to preventing and intervening against exploitation from Knowsley Council, Merseyside Police, health and education organisations.

Exploitation is linked to the following priorities:

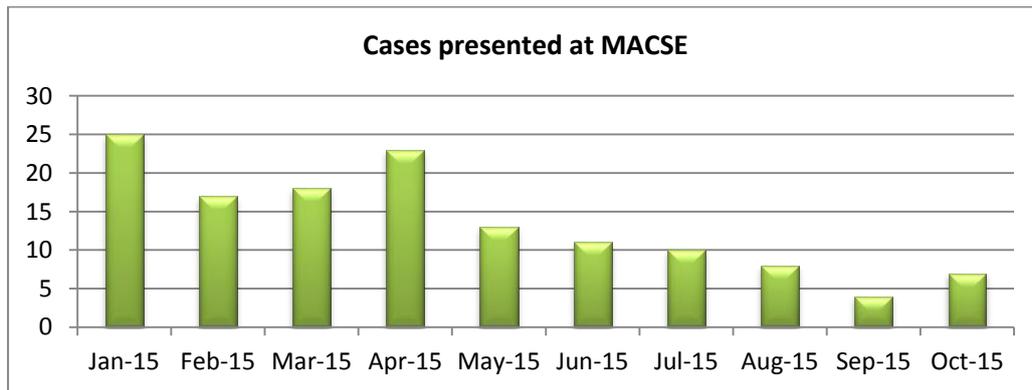
- Early Help, Child Protection, Children Looked After
- Youth Offending Service
- Domestic Violence – Community Safety
- Sexual Health
- Substance Abuse
- Guns and Gangs.

Impact on Knowsley residents

The number and characteristics of people affected by this issue; the key trends in recent years, and expected future direction of travel.

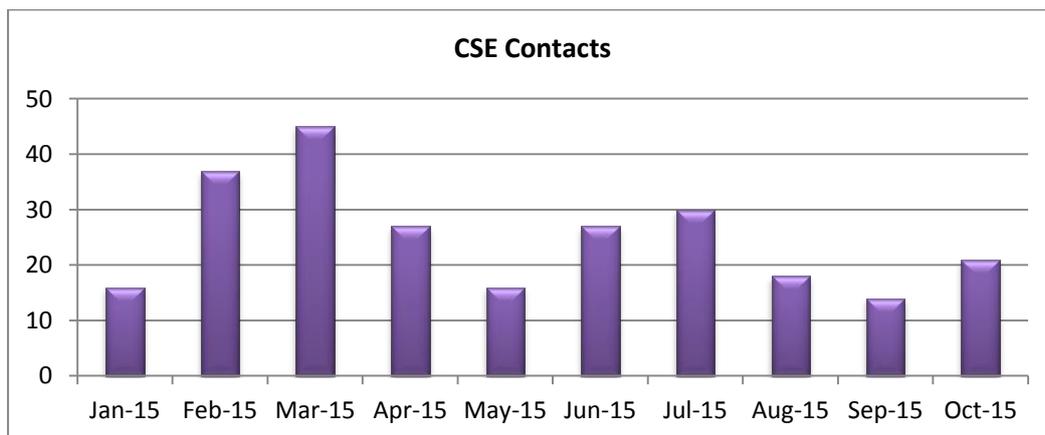
Numbers of children affected by this issue

(1) Child Sexual Exploitation: Since April 2014 there have been 137 cases discussed at MACSE. This measure is used because MACSE is the multi-agency meeting where CSE cases are discussed, and actions are decided upon. The current cohort of CSE cases in Knowsley is 58. The below chart shows the number of nominals presented and discussed at each MACSE meeting:



The fall in numbers of cases is indicative of changes in processes – more effective triage of cases before they reach MACSE meetings, and ongoing and open cases being dealt with in a different manner. New cases or cases with new information are now presented at MACSE, with updates provided on open and ongoing cases. The fall in MACSE numbers does not indicate a reduction in identification or open cases.

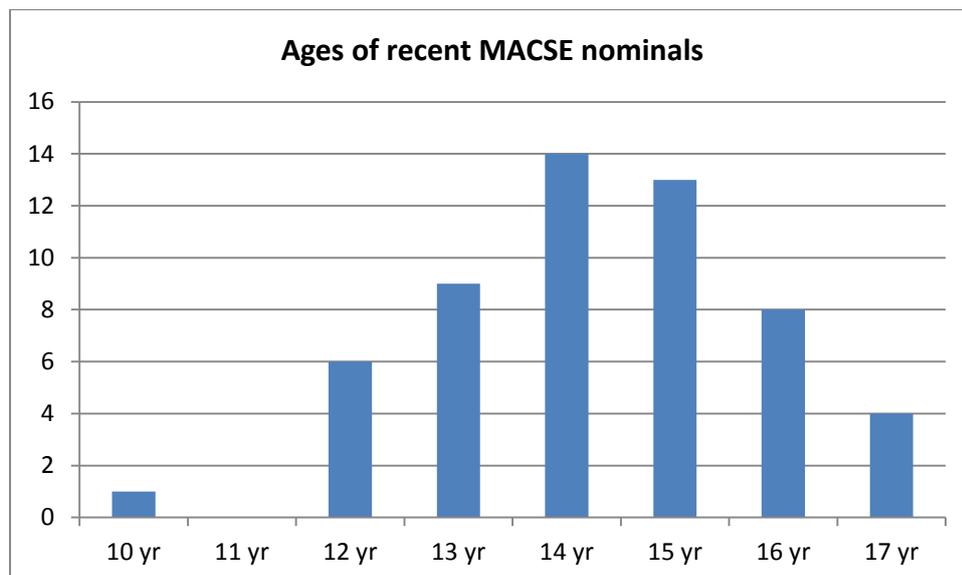
There have been 251 contacts to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) since January 2015. The number of contacts peaked in March, coinciding with the ‘week of action’ publicity drive about CSE:



Ages of those children known to be at risk of or victims of CSE:

Current analysis of ages shows that the highest proportion of known victims of CSE are aged 14 and 15 years old. The numbers of children aged younger than 14 years old demonstrates an increase in incidence since the Merseyside Police published their 2014 Problem Profile. In the Problem Profile published in 2014, 14% of CSE victims were aged under 14, whereas in 2015, 30% of known CSE

victims are aged younger than 14 years old. This represents both an increase in proportion and incidence of younger children identified as victims of CSE.



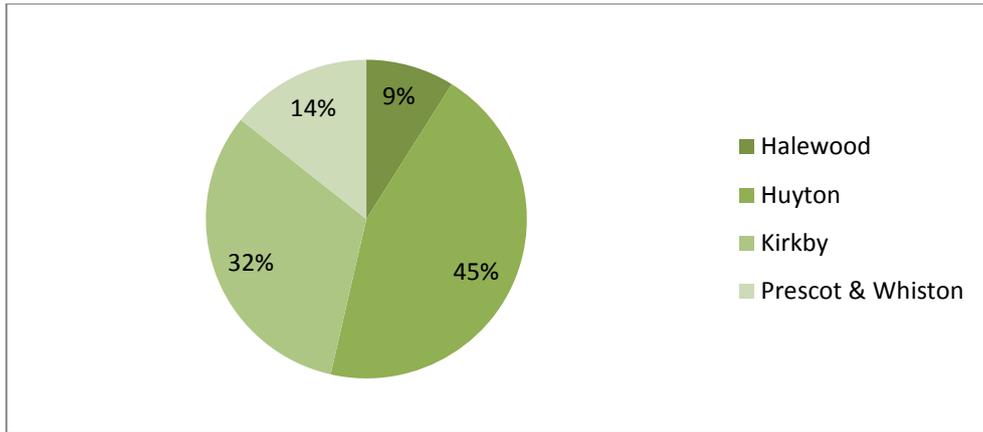
Amongst the younger cohort there are more likely to be children who have been engaged in exploitation through social media or online only (not in person), than among those aged over 13. However, the seriousness of cases is no less with the younger part of the cohort. Amongst the 12-year olds there is evidence of children having sex with older boyfriends, multiple missing episodes, and allegations of drug and alcohol use.

In Merseyside, suspected perpetrators of CSE are likely to be aged between 18-25 years old, with the dominant model of exploitation being the boyfriend model. The boyfriend model (as described in Barnardo's 'Puppet on a String' research) is where the perpetrator befriends and grooms a young person into a 'relationship' and then coerces or forces them to have sex with friends or associates. There are also examples of peer-to-peer exploitation, with 10% of all CSE suspects in Merseyside aged under 18.

This is important in terms of identifying needs, as it evidences that prevention and awareness raising should be focused on younger children in addition to older teenagers, and the parents of younger children through primary and secondary schools. With some of the older CSE cases there is evidence that sexual exploitation started at an earlier age, and once the child had experienced exploitation once, exploitation was likely to re-occur throughout their teens. With earlier interventions and effective practice it should be possible to halt the vulnerability to CSE, and support families to build resilience to exploitation.

Locations: CSE

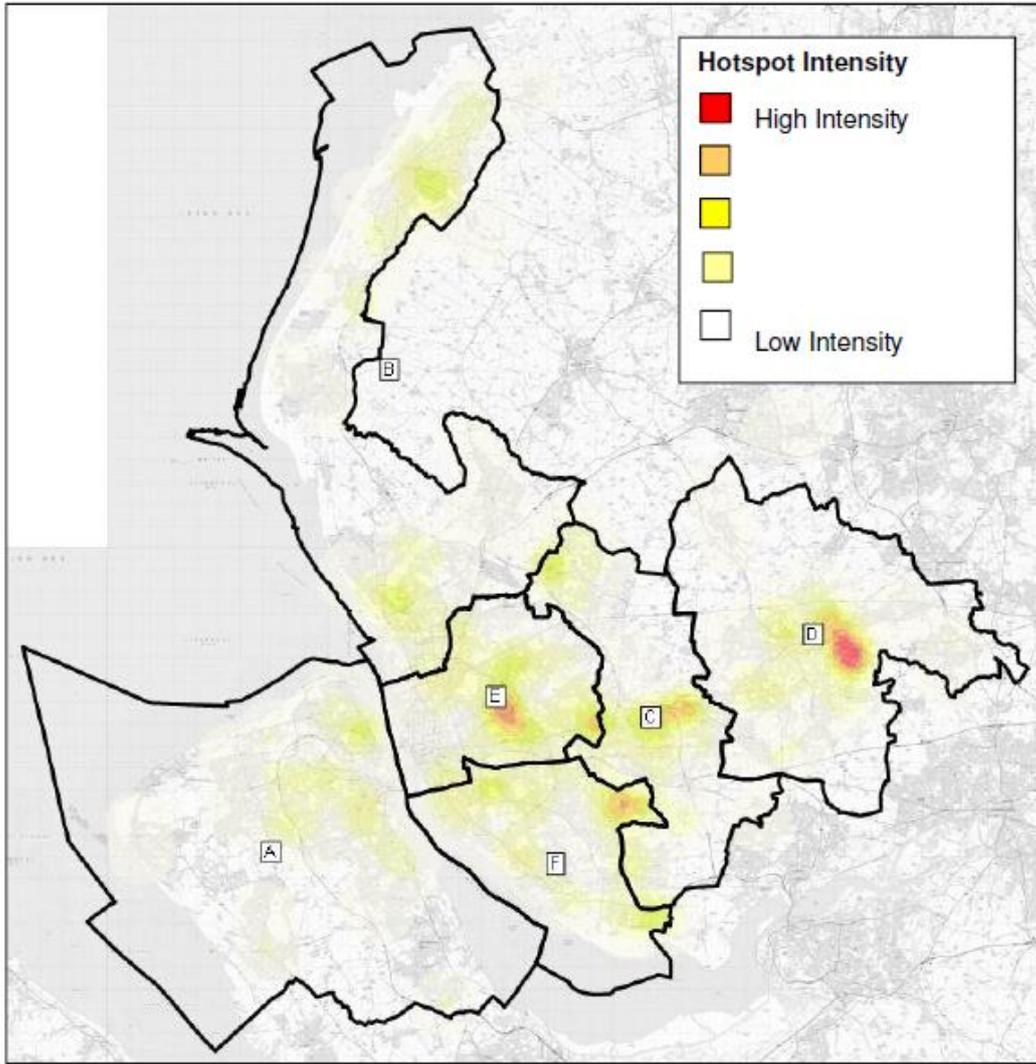
The majority of children who have experienced CSE in Knowsley are from Huyton and Kirkby. However, this number is affected by the number of residential homes (both Knowsley Council and privately provided) in these areas.



Knowsley has the highest rate of children educated outside of the Borough in the UK, and several of the exploited children attend schools in Liverpool, Sefton and St Helens. Every secondary school in Knowsley (including academies, faith schools, Special Educational Needs schools and Pupil Referral Units) have had at least one child identified as a victim of CSE, and identification has been greater in the schools who have been proactive in working with Merseyside Police and Knowsley Council on CSE.

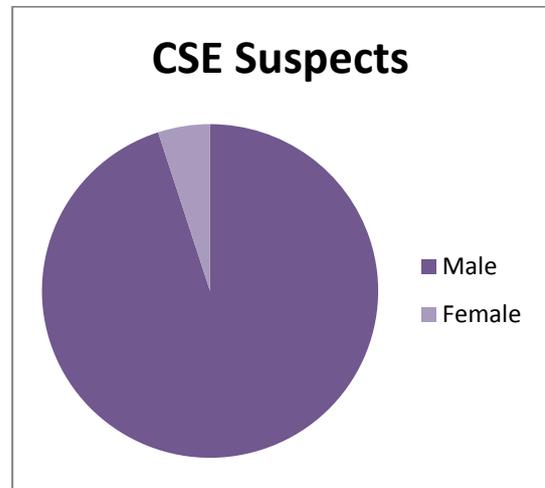
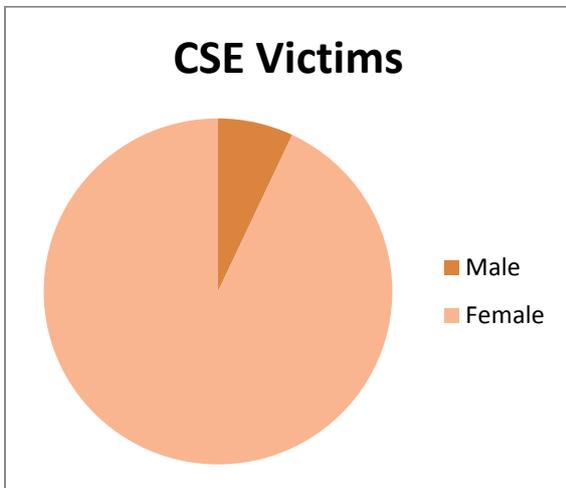
In terms of “hotspots” identified for CSE, the areas surrounding residential children’s homes are often identified as areas where children who are victims of CSE come from. The following map shows the identified hotspots across Merseyside¹:

¹ Taken from Merseyside Police CSE referral stats document.



Gender of known CSE victims:

The majority of known CSE victims are female. Recent cases in 2015, have shown that 7% of cases discussed at MACSE have been related to male victims. In terms of perpetrators in Merseyside, 95% of suspects are male; 5% are female:



Merseyside figures are used for suspected perpetrators of CSE, because there is significant evidence that much of the exploitation that children in Knowsley are subject to, either occurs elsewhere in Merseyside or the suspected perpetrators have an address outside of Knowsley.

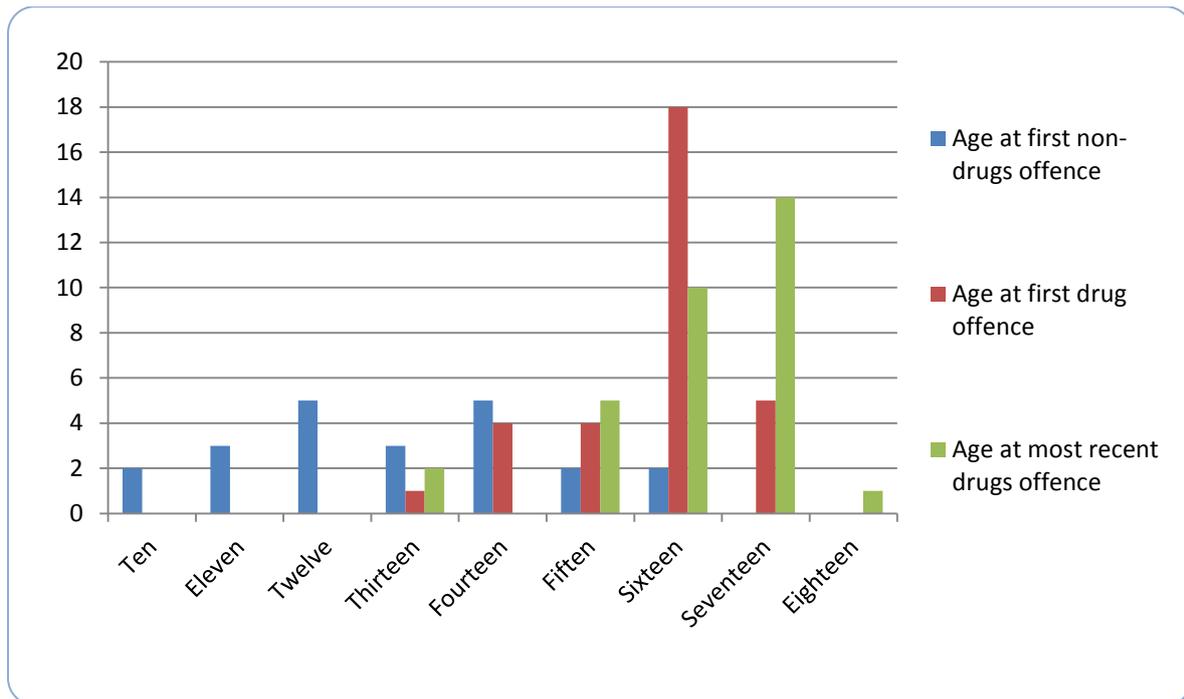
Nationally there is evidence that CSE is under-reported amongst male victims, especially among those that identify as heterosexual. However, in Knowsley known male victims of CSE tend to identify as homosexual, and there is evidence that these children engage in sexual activity for monetary return and for drugs, using dating apps and website to 'meet' older men. Research into the exploitation of LGBT young people found for children who identify as LGBT that they usually have no other opportunities to make LGBT friendships and relationships than to do so by "seeking access to the adult social scene which is highly sexualised and almost exclusively based in bars and clubs with all the associated risks. There is a spectrum of problematic behaviours which contribute to the risk of experiencing CSE, from the clumsy, unaware attentions of otherwise benign individuals to the conscious, deliberate and systematic pursuance of young people. For the latter there was much evidence of use of a combination of tried and tested grooming methods and a parasitic and cunning utilisation of the latest communication technologies."² **For information, please refer to the Protected Characteristics JSNA.**

While the majority of CSE victims are female, awareness-raising, prevention and education on healthy sexual relationships should be focused equally on male and female children. With the majority of known perpetrators being male, programmes that are also orientated around healthy sexual relationships should be targeted at males as part of effective long-term prevention.

(2) Criminal exploitation: 38 cases of known criminal exploitation have been assessed and analysed to understand the trends associated with criminal exploitation and for intelligence. However, in 2014/15 there were 119 arrests of Knowsley children for drug related offences, and April-September 2015 there have been a further 52 drug related arrests. These include repeat and multiple arrests for individual children, and will cover arrests for both "possession of" and "possession with intent to supply" and "conspiracy to supply" drugs.

The below chart shows the ages of arrests from the criminal exploitation cohort; showing that while the majority of drugs offences take place at ages 16 and 17, the history of offending/arrests of these children can start at younger ages (but they are often not drug related). This tells us that while the key ages for serious drugs offences are 16 and 17, there is evidence of offending cumulating over years for many of these children and young people.

² Findings of Scoping Exercise into Practitioners knowledge of Child Sexual Exploitation of LGBT Young People in the North East Author: Deb Walker, Trinity Youth Association, Commissioned by Northern Rock Foundation



There is a noticeable difference in the dominant ages of the victims of CSE and those that have been criminally exploited. This can be understood further by looking at the children who have been criminally exploited, and the offences that they are arrested for; older children (aged 16 and 17) have been caught in possession with intent to supply of Class A drugs, than cannabis. The younger members of the cohort tend to be arrested in possession of cannabis, and in the last 18-months there has been an increase in the offences related to Class A drugs:

Possession and Possession with intent to supply Class B:

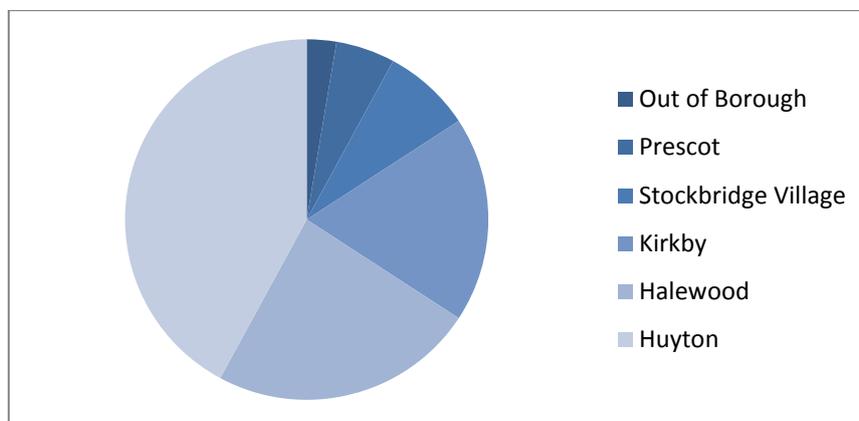
- There are 49 incidents, and 31 children/young people who have been arrested for possession and/or possession with intent to supply Class B drugs.
- 18 of the incidents are possession with intent to supply.
- There are 13 young people who have had more than one arrest for “possession with intent to supply Class B”.
- The charges took place mostly in 2014, with one incident in 2012 and in 2013.

Possession and Possession with intent to supply Class A:

- There are 24 incidents, and 19 children/young people who have been arrested for incidents involving Class A drugs.
- 17 of the incidents are “possession with intent to supply.”
- Only one of the incidents occurred in 2012, otherwise they occurred in 2014 and 2015 – with these being Class A and more serious offences does this mean that the possession and supply of Class A drugs by young people is a more recent phenomenon
- Those young people who are in possession of Class A drugs tend to be older – aged 16 and 17.
- Those young people who were arrested for possession with intent to supply away from the Merseyside area tended to be selling Class A drugs, this follows patterns from case studies from London and the South East where those involved in County Lines were transporting and selling Class A drugs.

Locations relating to Child Criminal Exploitation:

Significant numbers of children who have been criminally exploited come from Huyton and Halewood.



Unlike the CSE cohort, there is not the same distribution across all of Knowsley's schools for those children who have been criminally exploited, but they do tend to be educated within the Borough. Many of the children have spent time outside of mainstream secondary provision, and over 71% have had attendance issues, and 52% have had a referral to an Educational Psychologist.

Gender of known victims of Child Criminal Exploitation:

Within the criminally exploited cohort, there is only one female, the rest of the children and young people are male. In Knowsley, the ratio of offences committed by younger males far outweighs that of females; younger males also have higher rates of reoffending and tend to be involved in more serious crimes.

Crossover of sexual and criminal exploitation cohorts:

Recent CSE cases that have dominated media reports (Rochdale, Rotherham, Oxfordshire) have been dominated by the organised/networked sexual exploitation or trafficking – where young people are passed through networks where they may be forced/coerced into sexual activity with multiple men. This activity is described as serious organised crime and can involve the organised buying and selling of young people. In Merseyside, the dominant model of exploitation is the boyfriend model and there have been no robust links made with Serious Organised Crime and Organised Criminal Gangs and CSE, despite the significant involvement of drugs and illegal substances in many of the cases.

There are strong links between the criminally exploited cohort, and local crime groups; one child is a member of an Organised Crime Group, three were known members of Urban Street Gangs, and nine more were associated to the Urban Street Groups.

The primary area of risk between the two cohorts is the extensive use of drugs, and how drugs are obtained and used. However, there are isolated examples of crossover between the two cohorts; there is evidence that one of the children who has been a victim of criminal exploitation has engaged in sexually harmful behaviours with young girls, and that one recent MACSE nominal has had involvement in selling drugs, and is at risk of criminalisation.

Although these are currently presenting as isolated incidents, it will be important to review both cohorts in the future and understand further where there are overlaps. Through national research into “County Lines” (moving young people around the country to distribute and sell drugs) it has been possible to identify that the profile of the children who are targeted to become involved in this by Organised Crime Groups has changed; from targeting boys who were known to the criminal justice system, to those who were not known, to girls. This means that to counter the threats, it is important to understand and know who is being targeted and what vulnerabilities are being capitalised upon, and there is a greater need for more understanding and research into these cohorts.

Characteristics of children affected by exploitation:

(1) Backgrounds – Adverse Childhood Experiences

Children who are exploited, either sexually or criminally, share common vulnerabilities. Nationally, the vulnerabilities are recognised as being those children who are or have experienced the following adverse childhood experiences:

- Living in a chaotic or dysfunctional household (including parental substance use, domestic violence, parental mental health issues, parental criminality).
- History of abuse (including familial child sexual abuse, risk of forced marriage, risk of ‘honour’-based violence, physical and emotional abuse and neglect).
- Recent bereavement or loss.
- Gang association either through relatives, peers or intimate relationships (in cases of gang associated CSE only).
- Attending school with young people who are sexually exploited.
- Learning disabilities.
- Unsure about their sexual orientation or unable to disclose sexual orientation to their families.
- Friends with young people who are sexually exploited.
- Homeless.
- Lacking friends from the same age group.
- Living in a gang neighbourhood.
- Living in residential care.
- Living in hostel, bed and breakfast accommodation or a foyer.
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence.
- Young carer.

In Knowsley there is an identified link between children who have had Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and exploitation. Led by Public Health England there is a growing body of research that reveals the long-term impacts of experiences and events during childhood have on individuals’ life chances. Adverse Childhood Experiences such as abuse, neglect and dysfunction home environments have been shown to be associated with the development of a wide range of harmful behaviours including smoking, harmful alcohol and drug use, risky sexual behaviour, violence and crime. They are also linked to diseases such as diabetes, mental illness, cancer and cardiovascular disease, and ultimately to premature mortality.

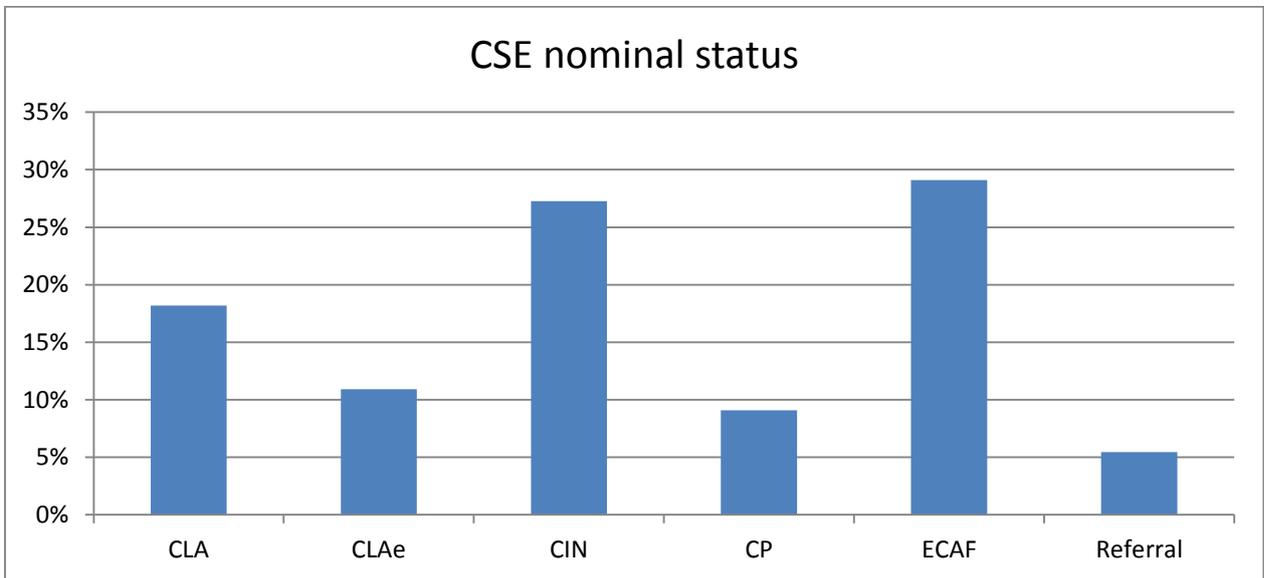
Child Sexual Exploitation: Of the CSE cohort, 84% have evidence of adverse childhood experiences, these include:

- High levels of recorded incidents of domestic violence within their families – includes between adults (parents and partners) and siblings and parents, also evidence of violence inflicted on the family from people outside the family.

- Criminal activity, including members of family serving jail sentences, and older siblings engaged in drugs and potential criminal exploitation
- There are issues of abuse, neglect and negative parental relationships – including those where the child no longer resides with their parents, but another family member. There are also high levels of parental separation among the cohort.
- 12% of the current CSE cohort are children looked after from outside Boroughs – these are included in those likely to have had adverse childhood experiences.

The above details the recorded issues, and there may exist hidden issues within the families in addition to the known issues. Some of the families whose children make up part of the CSE cohort have had long histories of engagement with children’s social services, especially those children who are looked after and have had many challenges in their childhood. However, among those included children who although there is evidence of adverse childhood experiences they were not at a threshold to meet child protection thresholds, and although they were known did not have interventions or services available to them. However, where children have been exploited online only, the majority of victims are unknown to services, and they are often vulnerable due to naivety, inexperience and curiosity.

In cases where there has been no previous social care engagement, the children who have been or at risk of sexual exploitation have either been part of a peer group who have become involved in child sexual exploitation, have Special Educational Needs, or have experienced depression, self-harm and drug use. However, all children who have been referred to the MACSE and found to be at risk of exploitation will have a plan in place:



Children with an active ECAF plan are those who tended not to have an existing child protection or CLA plan, when their CSE referral came to the attention of services, and where there is a high level or either protective factors from parents or the level of CSE that they have experienced has not been as severe. Early Help services often provide services at a preventative intervention level – for example for those cases where the child has experienced exploitation through social media, and it has been identified before the child experienced significant harm.

The more serious sexual exploitation cases have resulted in children being on Children in Need or Child Protection plans, and there are several examples where the child has become looked after and placed into residential care. In the most serious of cases, this has resulted in children being made subject to Court Orders. This has happened as a result of the parents not being able to keep their child safe and protected from the outside exploitative threats. There are also examples, especially among those children who are looked after, where the child and family were already receiving services from social care before exploitation was identified as a risk. Children looked after account for 1% of the total Knowsley child population, but as they represent 34% of the CSE cohort they are disproportionately represented in the cohort. It is important to understand that children come into care because they are at risk of CSE, however, for others they may be at risk as a result of being in foster care or residential care. Children looked after are among the most vulnerable children in our community, and in national cases of exploitation, there is evidence that looked after children are targeted by exploiters.

Criminal Exploitation: Children who have been criminally exploited often have similar backgrounds to those who have been sexually exploited, and have lived with challenges associated with adverse childhood experiences. These have included:

- Analysis of the families of criminally exploited shows that 62% are from families where the parents are separated, or one of the parents has died.
- In 5% of the cases, the file notes that the parents still live together, and in the remaining 32% there is no such information in the case file. This means that the number of children in this cohort with separated parents could increase.
- 25% of cases have criminality within the family – generally their Father, but often older siblings also. Not all criminality is drug related; examples of fraud charges, paedophilia and rape, domestic violence and drug convictions.
- Many of the families have experiences of ill-health, poor mental health or bereavement. When combined with a single parent household, this often seems to contribute to the child or children being beyond the control of the parent.
- Bereavement – of close family members or close friends has had significant impacts on this cohort of children and young people. In one example it had an overall positive effect, with the young person moving away from criminality.
- Chaos or at least instability in most family backgrounds – or where effective supervision of children is not in place, this is often noted in case files, and it is common for missing episodes not to be reported by parents who do not have overall control of their children.
- Evidence of tolerance of cannabis use throughout the cohort.

The primary difference in the two cohorts, is that the children who have been criminally exploited are more likely to have examples of criminality within their family, which increases their vulnerability to criminal exploitation. There is further evidence that those children who have criminality within their family are more likely to be involved in the more serious drug cases (repeated arrests for Class A drugs, placed in situations that involve greater risks).

55% of children who have been criminally exploited have had a Children's Social Care or Early Help Plan. The 45% who have not had a plan includes children who have recently moved to the area, and those that were identified as first time offenders. The children who have had previous engagement with children social care includes:

- 18% are/have been children looked after, in some cases this is due to be accommodated in secure units following drugs charges.
- 26% have been on a child protection plan, and 36% have been considered to be a child in need.
- Stronger Families have worked with 8% of the cases (3 individuals).
- 8% have had a referral to children's social care that has been subject to no further action
- Children with no previous social care plans have tended to be those who have gotten into debt with exploiters, and had not previously had any criminal experiences.



What does the connection between exploitation and adverse childhood experiences mean for the needs of children who are vulnerable to exploitation:

(1) That their previous experiences have contributed to vulnerability to exploitation – whether this is through not understanding healthy relationships as witnesses to domestic violence or those that have had families dominated by criminality – these experiences have contributed to either a lack of resilience or greater vulnerability, especially in terms of filling emotional vacuums with perceived love or through gang engagement. Through this understanding it should be possible to consider prevention work for families where these issues are prevalent in protecting children in the long-term, beyond the acute crisis. This will mean greater access to support services, including CAMHS and other mental health and counselling services, for families and children, for longer periods of time.

(2) Resilience to exploitation is affected by specific conditions – notably domestic violence, negative relationship with parents. The high levels of parental separation in the cohort does contribute to the vulnerability to exploitation, especially in terms of having overall supervision or control of children. There are multiple occasions where missing episodes are not fully realised, children do not always have the consistent presence and comfort of both parents and families in their lives and this does make them more susceptible to exploitation. This means that preventative work needs to be done within the community, considering and understanding the role of other family members like Grandparents in a child's life. Schools will also play a significant role in helping children to build their own resilience to exploitation, and understanding of healthy sexual relationships.

(3) Every level of service provided by Knowsley Council to children and families will need to provide services for children at risk of exploitation, from Early Help teams to children looked after teams. There have been, and there will continue to be, opportunities to work proactively with many of these vulnerable children before they become exposed to exploitation.

(4) As well as being an outcome of adverse childhood experiences, exploitation will contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing needs of the children both now and in the future. In the both cohorts, children can experience extreme levels of stress, especially where coercion and threats are used by the exploiters. The knock-on effects of stress are significant; studies of Adverse Childhood Experiences have been used to examine the relationships between early life stressors, the development of health harming behaviours and, to a lesser extent, risks of non-communicable diseases in later life. Exposure to childhood trauma causes immediate physical damage, but also introduces lasting biological and psychological changes. Thus, childhood trauma can alter brain development adding to wear and tear on physiological systems, expediting the development of poor health into adulthood. Multiple studies show exposure to ACEs increases propensity for behaviours linked to development of non-communicable diseases including alcohol, tobacco and drug abuse. Such behaviours and impacts of lifestyle and trauma all contribute to increased risks of premature morbidity in ACE sufferers.³ Many of the children who have been exploited have been exposed to ACEs already and with the additional stress and trauma related to exploitation, the long-term impact on their mental and physical health will be significant, and involve significant levels of support.

(2) Characteristics of exploitation in Knowsley

The most common characteristics of children who have been **sexually exploited** in Knowsley are:

- Repeat missing episodes from home and care – in Knowsley there are children looked after who have a high volume of missing episodes. These children are often accommodated in residential care, and are identified as being at risk of or exposed to exploitation. Children often go missing from home, but are not consistently reported to the Police – this may be connected with tolerance of child being missing or just a lack of overall control of the child. Missing from school is also a considerable characteristic – and schools attendance is often poor amongst this cohort.
- Use of drugs or alcohol – use of cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine and legal highs in particular are found in many of the cases. Greater use of alcohol and attending parties.
- Self-harm/suicide attempts
- Child looked after, especially those in residential care
- Immaturity, and lack of awareness of vulnerability.

In **criminal exploitation** cases, the common characteristics include:

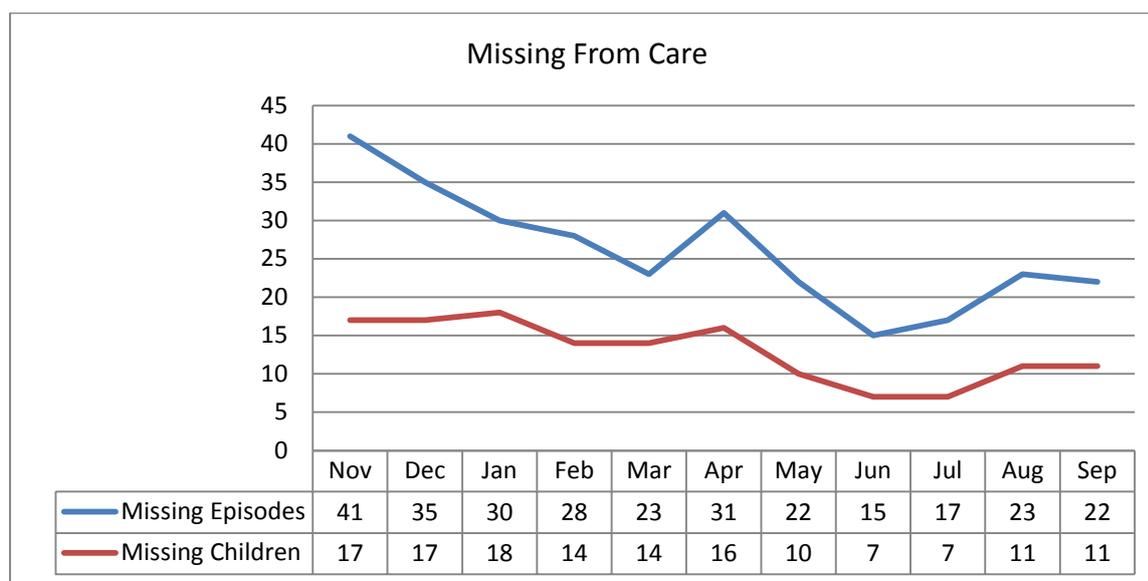
- Cannabis use – especially when tolerated by parents, but unknown how it is being funded.
- Missing from home – especially repeat incidents not reported by parents (when parents cannot account for their child's whereabouts, for example).
- Missing from school, refusing to attend any educational setting and not engaging with school.
- Gang activity or significant ties with gangs/criminality (for example, through family).

³ Measuring mortality and the burden of adult disease associated with adverse childhood experiences in England: a national survey: M.A. Bellis, K. Hughes, N. Leckenby, K.A. Hardcastle, C. Perkins

- Having tickets to big events like music festivals, having more cash with no obvious source.

Missing from home/care

Children who repeatedly go missing from home and/or care are at higher risk of being exposed to exploitation, or are already victims of child exploitation. In 2014/15, 42 children looked after went missing across 335 episodes and from April to October 2015, 32 children looked after have had 130 missing episodes. Among this cohort are individuals who have high levels of repeat missing episodes, and are placed in residential placements as a result of this.



54% of the current CSE cohort has had missing episodes reported to the police, including those who are looked after and those who are not. Missing episodes contribute significantly to fractures in relationships between children and their families and carers, and when combined with drug and alcohol experiences put children at significant risk of exploitation.

In Knowsley's criminally exploited cohort, it was found that children would often go missing (or parents were unable to account for their exact whereabouts) and it would not be reported to the police. Whether this is a result of discord, neglect or the young person is beyond parental control, these incidents are not reported. There are also examples of single parent households where the parent works nights, and their child's overnight activities are not known. Therefore, it is not possible to derive an accurate figure for the number of missing episodes for this cohort.

However, there are several incidents of young people absconding from bail, and going missing ahead of court dates. While they may not be reported by their parents as missing, their whereabouts are unknown. This occurs in some of the more serious cases, and it should be asked if they are hiding, who is hiding them and what are they doing while they are away from Knowsley and their home environment? There is a risk that once they have been arrested for one offence, and are under a referral order they could continue to perpetrate drug related crimes locally or in other areas.

Running away or going missing is a key early indicator of child exploitation, with recent national research has found that as many as 70% of children who are sexually exploited go missing. Recent missing cases in Knowsley that have shown indicators of exploitation, have often been reported as missing from school, not at home. There is considerable evidence that says that going missing within school hours is a significant vulnerability relating to exploitation.

Recent trends

The dominant model of **child sexual exploitation** follows what Barnardo's describe as the "boyfriend model":

"The perpetrator befriends and grooms a young person into a 'relationship' and then coerces or forces them to have sex with friends or associates."

However, CSE is not homogenous, and there are examples of other forms of sexual exploitation that are evident in current CSE cases:

(1) Exploitation undertaken through **social media or the internet** that involves either requests for or sharing of explicit images, or incitement to perform sexual acts. This is not converted into contact between victim and exploiter, and the exploiter is often located outside of Knowsley (often in another country). Where this is prevalent among younger children, it is often identified by parents or carers.

(2) Relationships between younger (often vulnerable) children and older males, that are felt by professionals to be exploitative and often involving domestic violence. This can include boys who seek homosexual relationships outside their peer group, who can be exploited by older males, and are exposed to risks around sexual health and substance abuse. These relationships can often start online, through social media or **even dating apps such as Grindr and Tinder**, and start with exchange of images, explicit images and can culminate in meeting.

(3) Cases where there have been **allegations of sexual assaults and rape** between a vulnerable child and older males. These children are often vulnerable through having a learning disability, having known mental health problems including depression, and self-harm and previous engagements with social care for neglect. These incidents of sexual assault and rape have involved drinks being spiked at parties or "hang-outs", and consent not being understood (a particular risk for children with learning disabilities and/or autism). There are examples where consent has been given to sex, when they felt under pressure from a peer. How well understood consent is, is an important element in understanding not only vulnerability to CSE, but also how the perpetrator views their sexual relationships.

(4) Exploitation where **drugs and alcohol are the 'gift'** that the child receives in exchange for sex; this can be part of a relationship on an individual basis, or larger groups of children can be subject to this form of exploitation and subject to sex with multiple partners. There are also examples of cases where children have agreed to have sex in exchange for money or drugs, without the façade of a relationship. A high proportion of cases show evidence of drug and alcohol use being a key factor in the exploitation, either their use making them vulnerability or availability of drugs is a key part of the inducement.

Among the cohort of children identified as **criminally exploited**, there are three identifiable models of exploitation:

(1) **First time offenders** – these are young people who have not had an offending past, and their first arrest is for a serious drugs offence. Common across these cases is debt, young people from this

cohort have accrued debt (through borrowing cash or using cannabis without having enough money to pay for the drugs), and consequentially have been coerced into selling drugs (mainly Class A cocaine and heroin).

(2) **Family crime connections** – throughout the cohort there are several examples of cases where there is a strong family connection to criminal activities. Often their father or close family member has previous convictions for drugs or other illicit activities. Amongst these young people are those who have been arrested for possession with intent to supply alongside older family members.

(3) **History of offending** – amongst this cohort of young people are those who have had multiple arrests and/or charges for offences such as criminal damage, anti-social behaviour, and traffic offences. These offences have generally taken place at ages 13-15, with arrests for possession of drugs and intent to supply coming at ages 15-17. Among this model are those who are known to have Urban Street Gang or Organised Crime Group connections.

Expected future direction

It is expected that the number of cases of exploitation will increase over the next 12-months, due to better identification of cases and greater understanding of what exploitation is. In November 2015, a multi-agency team designed to respond to child exploitation was launched. Through greater engagement with the community and schools, identification is likely to increase, especially for lower risk cases.

How residents, communities, and stakeholders view this issue and impact on life experiences.

Recent consultation has been undertaken on the issue of Child Exploitation with the Local Advisory Groups. Responses from the local communities included:

- Recognised correlations between children being absent from school and being exposed to child exploitation.
- The work of the multi-agency team 'Shield' was welcomed.
- Recognising that if young people were talking about child exploitation then they should be engaged proactively to understand the risk factors and characteristic associated with exploitation.
- Facilitated training and awareness raising should be offered to youth clubs and other places where children participate, such as the Scouts, Brownies etc.
- Training should also be provided to officers from partner agencies who deal with residents on a daily basis, so they can be made aware of the potential signs to look.
- An advisory group member referenced the PACE (Parents against child sexual exploitation) training they had recently received. He highlighted that the training had been extremely valuable and encouraged such opportunities to be provided to parents and carers.
- Social media is now a huge problem and more work is required with children in respect of keeping safe online.
- It was recognised that adult males who were involved in criminal activities often started in low level crime from an early age. The behaviours they exhibited at this early age could be used to identify other young males who were acting in similarly and provide the appropriate interventions.

- It is important to create an environment where children felt safe coming forward with any issues they may have.

As this is still an emerging area of practice, many of the responses were around what could be done to raise greater awareness within the communities that they represent. Overall, although many of the community representatives found the information that was shared upsetting, there was a positive perspective on how resources were being dedicated in recognition of how important this area is.

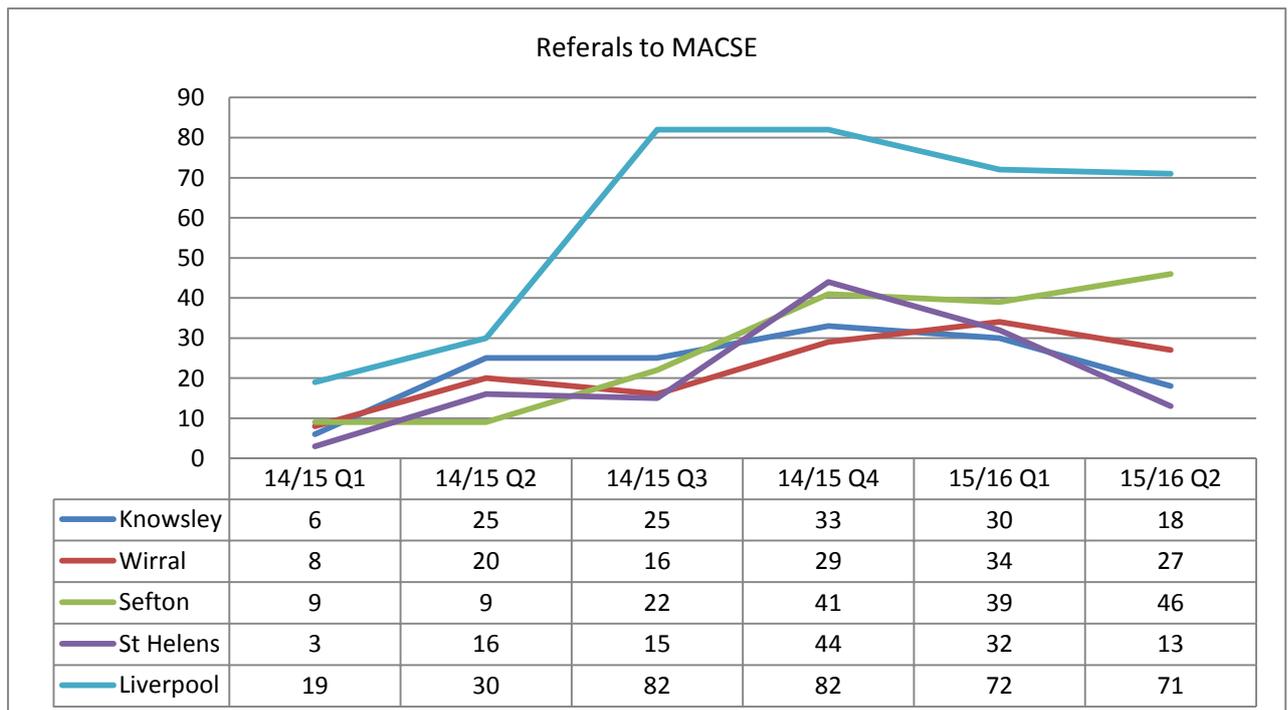
The scale of health and other inequalities

Comparison with national and regional averages and statistical neighbours.

In the National Strategic Assessment, it is stated that while child sexual exploitation and abuse represents one of the high highest serious and organised crime risks to young people, that we may never know the full extent of the problem. Police and social care operations and high profile cases have given a better insight into the scale and the challenges it presents, but as much of the exploitation is hidden understanding the scale and being able to make effective comparisons is difficult.

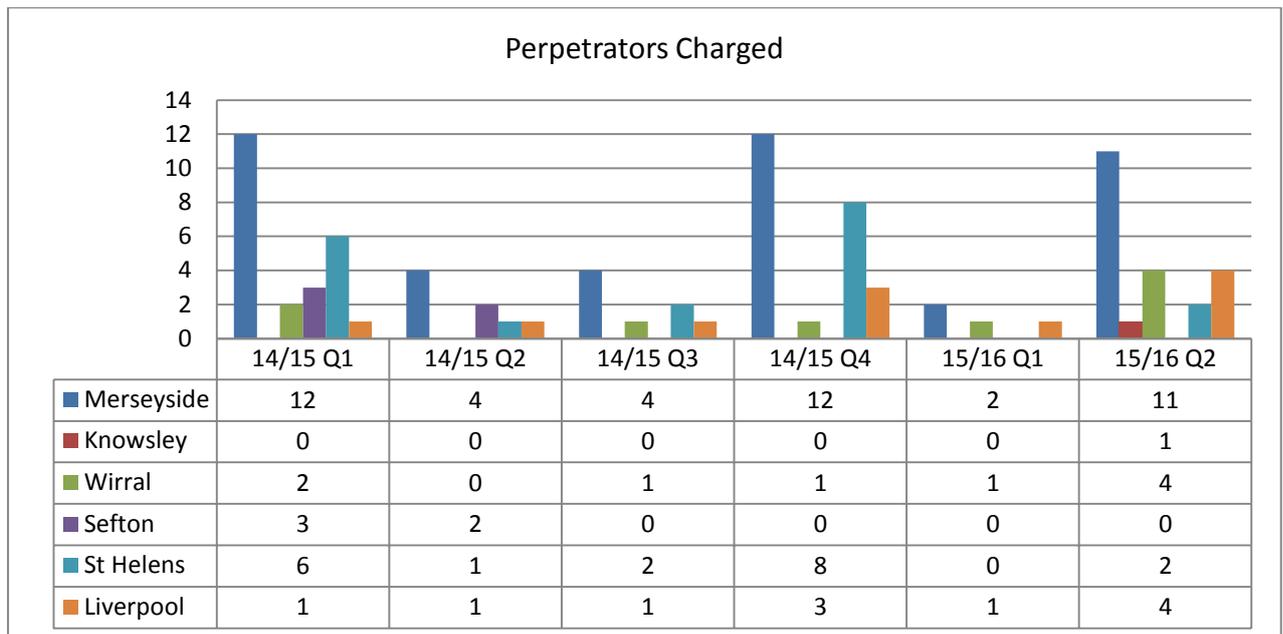
(1) Child sexual exploitation – comparison with Merseyside areas

Since April 2014, there have been 916 referrals to MACSEs across Merseyside. The largest number of referrals has been for children who live in Liverpool, due to the correspondingly larger population. The five Boroughs that comprise Merseyside follow a broadly similar pattern of MACSE referrals, rising from a low baseline in Quarter 1 2014/15, to Quarters 3 and 4 in 2014/15, followed by levelling off in 2015/16. This is indicative of there has been greater understanding and identification of CSE throughout Merseyside in the last 18-months:

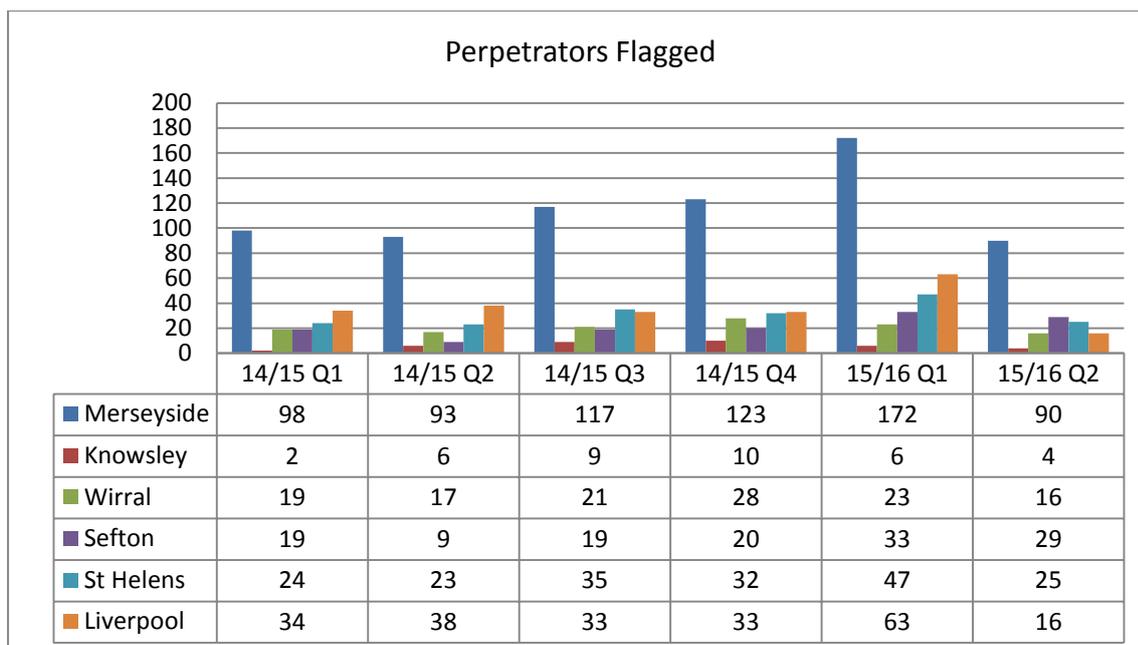


Knowsley has a similar number of MACSE referrals to Wirral, Sefton and St Helens, despite having a smaller child population. This information shows that CSE is present throughout Merseyside, and that significant work has been undertaken over the last 18-months to understand and identify the scale of CSE in Merseyside.

Over the last 18-month, 45 perpetrators have been charged with child sexual exploitation in Merseyside. The chart below shows where in Merseyside the perpetrators live. In the last 18-months, only one Knowsley resident has been charged as a perpetrator of CSE. Although it is recognised that much of the CSE that children in Knowsley experience takes place outside of the Borough boundaries, more work needs to be done to identify and charge perpetrators in Knowsley.



Looking at the number of offenders that have been flagged (this is where a threat connected to a specific person is identified, individuals can have multiple flags), there is evidence that Knowsley residents have significantly fewer flags than other areas in Merseyside:



The Merseyside wide data shows CSE does not exist in isolation in Knowsley, and it is a threat felt throughout Knowsley. The benefits of sharing services on a Merseyside coterminous basis around exploitation could be beneficial – especially in terms of sharing intelligence and working proactively to prevent, protect and prosecute.

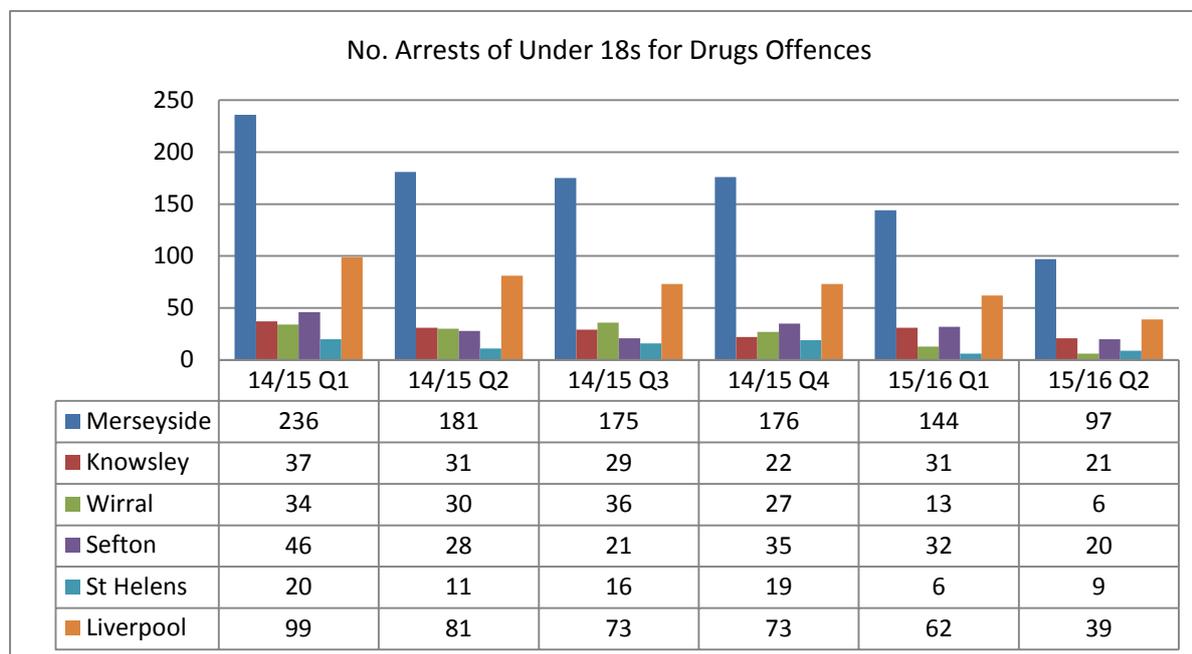
(2) Criminal Exploitation

National and regional work on child criminal exploitation is in its infancy, and opportunities to compare prevalence of criminal exploitation are limited. Research has been published on County Lines; whereby urban criminal groups establish telephone numbers in rural areas outside of their normal locality, to sell Class A drugs at street level. Intelligence indicates that ‘county lines’ enterprises almost always exploit vulnerable persons. Criminal groups use violence and exploit drug addictions in order to establish bases in vulnerable people’s homes, and force their assistance. Young people are also commonly exploited, being recruited to work as runners. Children are perceived as inexpensive, easily controlled and less likely to be detected by law enforcement.

In the ‘NCA Intelligence Assessment: County Lines, Gangs and Safeguarding’ it states that there is evidence of county lines modus operandi in seven police forces in the UK, and that 827 nominals had been identified as being involved in this type of activity. The majority of the nominals (66%) involved in this activity were aged between 17 and 25, with 39 identified as being aged 16 and under. This is different from the Knowsley profile, where there is significant evidence for the young people being mainly aged 16-18 who are engaged in this profile of behaviour. However, as the approach from Knowsley has come from a safeguarding perspective, it is people aged under-18 who have been the subject of this study; there will be young people involved and entrenched in this activity who are aged 18 and over.

It is possible to compare data on arrests for drug offences in under-18’s across Merseyside. Drugs offences will include those arrested for possession, as well as those arrested in possession with intent to supply/conspiracy to supply offences. The information below shows that drug

crime is active throughout Merseyside; as with CSE Liverpool has a higher proportion of drug arrests, and Knowsley is similar to Sefton and Wirral, despite a much smaller child population:



Current service provision and actions

Asset assessment

To respond to the threat of child exploitation, significant multi-agency resources have been dedicated to creating Shield, a co-located team comprised of police officers, social workers, education and health workers to ensure that there is holistic agency representation. The service offers a multi-agency approach that gives support, advice and guidance, educates, identifies and offers protection and long term support to children, young people up to the age of 18 years who are at risk of/or involved in CSE and or Criminal Exploitation and their families.

The overall aim of the service is to reduce and prevent children and young people from being exploited and to reduce the incidence of episodes of young people going missing. The service will:

- Provide a central point for all professionals and develop a centre of expertise with reference to CSE and CCE
- Provide a coordinated and proactive response in dealing with CSE as part of the prevention, protection and prosecution strategy
- Reduce and prevent children and young people from being exploited and reduce the incidence of repeat episodes of children going missing
- Improve the safety and wellbeing of children by reducing incidence of risky behaviour of those that access the service
- Promote the development of positive relationship with children and their families affected by CSE or CCE and provide support to other case holders
- Complete data collection to inform problem profiling and strategy planning
- Improve evidence gathering and information sharing
- Support the development of multi-agency profiling across the Borough

How expected trends are likely to impact on service provision

The expected trend for both forms of exploitation is that identification will increase, especially identification at lower levels of need, and that children will continue to be vulnerable to exploitation. Challenges connected to social media, and keeping pace with how social media is used to engage with children by exploiters will continue to be a significant part of the ongoing exploitation.

What challenges will service provision need to be aware of:

- Changing nature of exploitation, how the use of technology impacts upon exploitation, and the children being targeted through exploitation changing – service provision and interventions will need to be flexible enough to adapt to changes in profile and changes in how exploitation is carried out.
- Interventions that can be targeted at a range of needs – from universal provision, to early help and children's social care.
- Prevention work being both universal, and targeted. Prevention needs to be reinforced and repeated as the child becomes older.
- Preventative intervention programmes – for when a child is at risk, or has experienced any exploitation. Risk of exploitation does not always reduce after identification, and longer term work will need to be in place to ensure that children do not become vulnerable to exploitation in the future.
- Helping build resilience in all children – although some children are more vulnerable to exploitation as a result of their background, there are examples of children with no previous experience of ACEs who have been exploited, this means that resilience building for children should be both universal (through programmes such as HeadStart), and a more targeted approach for children with specific vulnerabilities.
- Emotional and mental wellbeing programmes, and the commissioning of services to specifically address issues around mental health for victims of exploitation, to help deal with the stresses and reality of what they have experienced. This should include lower level mental wellbeing support.
- Specific support for children who use drugs, in particular cannabis, and support for professionals to effectively challenge and prevent the usage.

Development of programmes for awareness but also dealing with the after effects of exploitation will need to be developed for:

- Children who have experienced exploitation (including emotional and mental wellbeing support, interventions on drugs and alcohol, and safe activities, educational and employment support)
- The families of children who have been exploited, to help support them to ensure it does not happen repeatedly, and support in understanding why it has happened, and how they can ensure that their children are safe.
- Schools and community services to be equipped to be able to identify but also support children facing exploitation, ensure that these are safe havens for children and they feel protected in schools and community services.

Evidence of what works locally and elsewhere

Child exploitation is an emerging area of practice, and in the next 12-months work will be in place to provide a clear understanding of how effective practice is, and where further improvements are required. However, there are areas of positive work that can be identified:

- Existing work in understanding criminal exploitation and identifying it as a threat, is ahead of many local authorities.
- Multi-agency working – recognition of the importance of exploitation, and positive working together. The establishment of the team, which is developing innovative practices and working with children at all levels of need, means that there are dedicated resources for an area of practice that cuts across many different service areas.
- There is good understanding of the need to develop new ways of working with children and families, and to make the most of available resources.
- In March, the week of action coincided with increased identification showing that awareness raising is effective in driving increased awareness that are converted to greater notifications
- Merseyside Police officers being based in secondary schools, means that the police are able to engender positive and trusting relationships with pupils.
- MACSE reviews – children open to Shield are re-assessed three months after their initial case at MACSE to ensure that their risk of exploitation has been reduced. This means that the work is outcome focused and enables Shield to identify good practice, and where improvements need to be made before exploitative situations can arise.

The serious case reviews that have taken place in areas such as Rotherham, Rochdale and Oxfordshire have included recommendations for practice and governance arrangements. These have been presented at CSE strategic meetings, and work has been undertaken to learn from practice models in places such as Rochdale. However, as it is an emerging area of practice, full scale evaluations have not been published on best practice and what work. From the Oxfordshire and the Rotherham Serious Case Reviews there were CSE specific recommendations, and there were also recommendations which are applicable throughout children's social care about sharing information and managing cases:

- Prioritisation of CSE by the LSCB including tracking of the link between strategic intentions and operational outcomes.
- Reviewing the current state of understanding, identification and practice regarding CSE across agencies, including the effectiveness of Child Protection processes for the victims of CSE.
- Early intervention
- Improving understanding and responding to neglect across the age range.
- Improving non-specialist understanding of learning disability/difficulties
- Review of escalation policies and their effectiveness and work on inter agency professional challenge
- Qualitative and outcome based assessment of functioning of the Sunrise team
- Ensure that the messages from victims and their families given to this review are embedded in training
- Seek evidence that minutes of multi-agency meetings are clear about ownership, have consistent titles, and can be seen by their content and appearance to be of high value
- Seek assurance from all member agencies that staff are aware of the guidance around consent to sexual activity, and relationships.