



Gathering evidence of the sexual exploitation of children and young people: a scoping exercise

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June 2008

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who contributed to this project by giving access to case information and, most importantly, for their generosity with their own valuable time.

The advisory group played an important role in steering the scoping exercise through to its conclusion. The group representatives were:

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Kathryn Hopkins/ Charlotte Allen	Ministry of Justice
Aarti Kapoor/ Maggie Brennan	Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
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Jean Pugh	Department for Children, Schools and Families
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Our particular thanks go to Cara Senouni at the University of Bedfordshire who provided the administration for both the advisory group and the project team.

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Key messages

Defining child sexual exploitation is central to the way in which local partnerships tackle the sexual exploitation of children and young people through the disruption and prosecution of offenders. Language and definitions are considered extremely important in terms of awareness and understanding of the issue and also, crucially, in terms of determining thresholds for intervention. For example, where a local partnership has used 'children involved in prostitution' as the basis for a protocol on sexual exploitation, this has resulted in a high threshold for intervention. A wider definition is required to protect children and young people 'at risk' and to gather evidence throughout the different models of sexual exploitation. They include trafficking and exploitation over the telephone or the internet where the perpetrator may never have direct contact with their victim. The following definition has been developed by the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (NWG):

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' (for example, food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of performing sexual activities and/or another performing sexual activities on them. Child sexual exploitation can occur through use of technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phone with no 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.

The original aim of the scoping exercise was to focus on the investigation process. However, almost half the areas included in the exercise were 'just starting out' to establish a multi-agency response to child sexual exploitation which includes challenging offenders. Local partnerships that are developing expertise in building successful prosecution cases initially face significant organisational issues. As a result the key messages from the scoping exercise address these issues as well as those directly related to the gathering of evidence, disruption plans and building cases for prosecution. The key findings are set out below and grouped under headings that reflect the way the report has been organised:

A multi-agency approach Existing guidance¹ on tackling child sexual exploitation makes clear the importance of a proactive and coordinated approach to tackling perpetrators. This section relates to the delivery of these objectives through a multi-agency partnership:

- in many areas there was evidence of a lack of focus on the proactive investigation of the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. Child protection units have been traditionally reactive but the move to inclusion in the work of PPU's is helping to develop a more proactive approach
- recognising the link between missing children and vulnerability to sexual exploitation enhances the criminal justice response

¹ Department of Health (2000); Association of Chief Police Officers (2004); Home Office (2006)

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- raising the priority of investigating child sexual exploitation is likely to require resources as well as reorganisation
- an appropriate allocation of resources to child sexual exploitation is likely to require the introduction of relevant performance indicators
- the involvement of voluntary sector specialist projects in multi-agency partnerships is invaluable for the delivery of intervention packages but requires the support of the LSCB
- the most robust organisational response is a dedicated unit with co-located staff
- in other models the development of a virtual team and the appointment/identification of a child sexual exploitation coordinator supports effective partnership working.

The foundation for effective evidence gathering Difficulties with translating information into viable evidence has been a barrier to securing prosecutions. This section relates to ways to improve the gathering, sharing and recording of information as a basis for building a case against a perpetrator:

- information sharing protocols based on child protection are likely to require adaptation to meet the needs of early intervention and investigation in cases of child sexual exploitation
- identifying risk factors and addressing them through early intervention demonstrates care for the young victim and builds trust to enable exploitation to be challenged
- specialist agencies, particularly if seen to be non-statutory, are well placed to build trusting relationships with young victims and their parents and carers
- providing support from first referral to post conviction, and beyond age 18 where required, can prevent re-victimisation and is more likely to be provided by a non-statutory specialist agency
- a child sexual exploitation coordinator, working with points of contact in each agency, provides a focal point for collating information and has been a turning point for building successful cases against perpetrators
- a wide range of agencies needs to be involved, including those who have not traditionally seen evidence gathering against perpetrators of child sexual exploitation as part of their role
- support from the CPS to raise awareness about collecting and preserving information in an evidentially viable way can be crucial to building a sound prosecution case
- data collection systems for missing persons can be useful for collating information on child sexual exploitation
- intelligence systems not only support individual investigations but also enable areas to map local activity to identify 'hotspots' and other common factors, and can contribute to a national picture of trends.

Developing a disruption plan Disruption is not necessarily a fall-back position. Developing a disruption plan can prevent children and young people at risk from becoming involved in exploitative relationships, and can help both victims and perpetrators to recognise the criminal nature of such relationships:

- coercive relationships are difficult to dislodge without a disruption plan

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- abduction warnings can be an effective way to sever contact between victims and perpetrators
- there is scope for greater use of police powers and court orders including SOPOs and RSHOs
- there is scope for increasing cooperation with other enforcement agencies to disrupt the process of exploitation.

Preparing a prosecution case This was at the heart of the scoping exercise. The main issue to be addressed was the general reluctance of young people to recognise or report exploitation, and the consequent difficulties of relying on their evidence:

- sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse but it raises unique issues as it involves particularly challenging young people who often do not recognise the coercive nature of their relationships
- creative investigative techniques help to corroborate the evidence of chaotic and/or reluctant young victims and witnesses
- a key worker approach provides the best support for young people during the investigation and prosecution process
- more effective outcomes are achieved where there is an early meeting between the police and the CPS
- child sexual exploitation strategies can be strengthened by discussing with the CPS how to integrate their policy on prosecuting criminal cases involving children and young people.

Awareness raising, training and guidance Both general awareness raising and specific training on investigative techniques were identified as necessary to raise the priority of child sexual exploitation and develop an effective local strategy:

- training enhances professionals' direct involvement in child sexual exploitation work, developing a cadre of specialists
- training those in contact with young people in a variety of settings ensures that they understand risk factors and routes for referring concerns, and aids identification, engagement, disruption and prosecution
- raising awareness with young people about the risk of sexual exploitation enables them to strengthen their protective behaviours to minimise their vulnerability
- awareness raising with the wider community enables everyone to be aware of the problem so that they can better protect vulnerable young people, and ensures that potential perpetrators understand the law and expect it to be applied rigorously.

1 Background

1.1 The government commissioned this scoping exercise to provide insight into the progress being made to challenge the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation, to report on emerging good practice and to identify the barriers and challenges that local partnerships are facing. The government's coordinated prostitution strategy² responded to the evidence submitted in response to the consultation document, *Paying the Price*³, and recognised that abusers seek out vulnerable children and young people, offering what appears to be affection and friendship. The reality can be that they are manipulated to become so dependent on their abusers that they can be coerced into sexual activity. Research also shows that young people often become sexually exploited as a result of long term social exclusion, poverty and deprivation and that there are complex relationships between sexual exploitation and 'risk factors' such as problem drug and alcohol use, poor mental and physical health and previous experiences of abuse.⁴ It also shows that boys and young men can be affected as well as girls and young women.⁵ Many local partnerships have built up considerable experience in safeguarding victims and developing strategies to help them to move on from exploitative relationships in safety and security. However, focussing on the offender is also crucial to prevent successive generations from becoming targets of sexual exploitation yet there has been little exploration of the role of local partnerships in challenging perpetrators.

1.2 Guidance on *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution*⁶ (the SCIP guidance) governs the way in which Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs, now Local Safeguarding Children Boards) respond to sexual exploitation. It provides advice on the development of protocols for safeguarding those at risk of, or involved in, sexual exploitation and promotes a proactive approach to the identification and investigation of perpetrators. A review of its implementation⁷ found that, although 84% of the 50 targeted ACPCs said that children were 'involved in prostitution' in their area, only 14% had made a start in prosecuting abusers, and just 6% believed they were meeting the dual aim of protecting children and prosecuting abusers. Since the issue of the SCIP guidance there has been a number of developments:

- **Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)** have taken over the functions previously carried out by ACPCs
- **The Sexual Offences Act 2003** introduced specific offences to address child sexual exploitation, recognising for the first time in law that grooming, coercing and trafficking can be involved, and that the internet and mobile phones are used as tools for exploitation.⁸ The age of consent remains at 16 but the 2003 Act extends the protection of the law so that no-one under 18 can consent to sexual activity where exploitation is involved. Consent to sexual activity under 18 cannot be used as a reason for condoning exploitation. The 2003 Act is not the only relevant legislation⁹ but it has significantly strengthened the legal framework.

² Home Office (2006)

³ Home Office (2004)

⁴ Melrose and Barrett (2004); Pearce et al (2002); Chase and Statham (2005)

⁵ Palmer (2001); Lillywhite and Skidmore (2006)

⁶ Department of Health (2000)

⁷ Swann and Balding (2002)

⁸ From 14th July 2008 section 73 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 widens the offence of meeting a child following sexual grooming.

⁹ Relevant legislation is set out in [appendix A](#)

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- **The UK Action Plan on Tackling Human Trafficking¹⁰** includes a child trafficking action plan. As part of this plan guidance has been published for practitioners¹¹ and a child trafficking helpline service¹² introduced to support frontline services
- **The UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC)** was set up as a police-led but multi-disciplinary unit combining research and intelligence to increase the knowledge and understanding of human trafficking among police and partner agencies. As well as trafficking from abroad, the UKHTC also focuses on internal trafficking which can involve the movement of children and young people from their home towns to other places in the UK for sexual exploitation
- **The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)** was set up in response to increasing concerns about the way in which the internet is used as a tool for the sexual abuse of children and young people. CEOP works with local forces to bring offenders to justice as well as providing professional training and educational programmes. BECTA has also published a toolkit¹³ to support LSCBs to develop an e-safety strategy, and the Byron Review¹⁴ recently published new recommendations to keep young people safe on the internet
- **The Staying Safe: Action Plan¹⁵** provides guidance on how to meet the Every Child Matters outcome of most relevance to child sexual exploitation. It commits the government to implementing the prostitution strategy and updating the SCIP guidance to 'set out a clear direction on the way in which children and young people at risk of, or suffering, sexual exploitation should be supported or protected.' It also includes commitments to develop national service guidelines through the Victims of Violence and Abuse Prevention Programme (VVAPP) for therapeutic and preventive interventions, forensic and medical examinations, and commissioning services for children and young people who are victims of sexual exploitation.

1.3 Sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse but it raises unique issues. It can involve particularly challenging young people who often do not recognise the coercive nature of their relationships. They may be involved in criminality and feel emotional and structural links with others in informal and criminal economies so that they make 'constrained choices' about their future.¹⁶ This means that they are not always recognised as victims of crime and, despite the robust new legislation and mechanisms to support the proactive policing of sexual exploitation, the emphasis in LSCBs has remained largely on child protection.¹⁷ This report provides the basis for the development of guidance and consideration of other ways in which local partnerships can be supported to tackle the sexual exploitation of children and young people through the disruption and prosecution of offenders.

¹⁰ Home Office (2007)

¹¹ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007)

¹² NSPCC National Child Trafficking Advice and Information Line 0800 1077 057

¹³ BECTA (2008)

¹⁴ Byron (2008)

¹⁵ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008)

¹⁶ Scott and Harper (2006); Phoenix (2002)

¹⁷ Chase and Statham (2005)

2 How the scoping exercise was conducted

Aims

2.1 The aim of the scoping exercise was to explore ways for local partnerships to disrupt the activities of those who sexually exploit children and young people and, where possible, take cases forward for prosecution. Specific aims included the exploration of:

- different structures to support effective multi-agency work
- methods that have worked to collate evidence to secure arrest and prosecution
- the role that different agencies can play to support police in the gathering of evidence
- the role that different agencies, including specialist projects, can play in supporting and advocating on behalf of children and young people who are victims of, or at risk of, sexual exploitation
- action that can be taken to prevent the continuance or escalation of sexual exploitation where there is insufficient evidence for a prosecution.

Methodology

2.2 A small-scale targeted literature review was undertaken using the key words 'child sexual exploitation' and 'child prostitution.' Searches focused on academic research publications, professional journals and children's charity publications, and on central government policy documents (2000-2008) relating to child protection, child care and young people's health and safety.

2.3 One region was initially selected for case study analysis. Anecdotal information led to case files for convictions achieved following a recent major operation. The files were identified, made available for analysis and follow up interviews conducted with key personnel. However there were difficulties in identifying other files as Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) recording systems are offence and defendant based and few other agencies used recording systems which could readily identify relevant cases. The methodology was changed to interviews with key personnel in twenty LSCB areas to explore models and approaches to the prosecution of offenders. The areas were selected on the basis of responses to brief questionnaires.¹⁸ Of the 30 completed questionnaires received, five indicated that little activity was taking place to investigate child sexual exploitation. The remaining twenty five were contacted to request interviews. Twenty LSCB areas responded positively and were included in the scoping exercise.

Questionnaires sent to

144 LSCBs

43 police forces – prostitution TAC advisers/ child protection officers

National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People (NWG)

Replies received

24

4 (additional to those received via the LSCB)

2 (additional to those received via the LSCB)

¹⁸ A copy of the questionnaire is reproduced at [appendix B](#)

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2.4 Efforts were made to interview at least two agencies in each of the twenty LSCB areas to compare procedures and processes and gain different agency perspectives. After these interviews were completed, a reflexive exercise was carried out with LSCB Chairs who were invited to comment on emerging themes and to add a strategic view. Three areas took up this opportunity. Similarly, in order to examine the local data in the context of a broader strategic view, the emerging findings were discussed with police and CPS policy leads, and with representatives of key national children's charities: Barnardo's, the Children's Society and the NSPCC.

2.5 Five areas were visited and interviews carried out in person. The remaining interviews were carried out over the telephone. All interviews followed a semi-structured questionnaire, supported by an agreed list of prompts and themes. With interviewee consent, interviews were recorded. The tape recordings and interview notes were analysed thematically by both team members. Identified themes were compared, cross referenced and summarised in a report circulated to the advisory group. The interviews generated a rich data bank and further in-depth analysis using NVivo software is subsequently being undertaken. Findings from this analysis will be available to the advisory group for use in the development of any guidance and/or training materials generated from this scoping exercise.

2.6 The areas included in the exercise had responded positively to the request for information and interviews and, in that respect, were self-selected. There will be a number of reasons why some areas responded to the initial brief questionnaire and others did not, including purely bureaucratic reasons. However, it is reasonable to conclude that the data collated for this exercise largely, although not exclusively, reflects areas with a greater level of involvement and expertise. Nevertheless the areas differ significantly in their responses to child sexual exploitation, in terms of both organisation and geographical context:

- 6 of the 20 areas had no specific protocols or arrangements
- 8 out of the 20 areas were scoping the issues with a view to introducing new arrangements
- 6 out of the 20 areas had dedicated operations in place

- 10 of the 20 areas were cities
- 7 of the 20 areas were small unitary authorities
- 3 of the 20 areas were largely rural areas with low density populations.

2.7 It was agreed by the advisory group to interview following self-selection rather than by purposeful targeting as, with time constraints in mind, the aim was to identify examples of good practice from experienced and motivated practitioners. It was hypothesised that the police and statutory children's services would have most experience in gathering evidence, disrupting and prosecuting offenders. This was reflected by those who self selected for interviews. Subsequent work in this area could purposefully target other key agencies involved, such as the CPS. Those interviewed came from the following agencies:

Police	16
Children's services – statutory	13
Children's services – voluntary	5
Community Safety Officer	1
CPS	1
Health	1
Education	1

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YOT	2
LSCB Business Manager	1
Independent chairs	3

Confidentiality and data protection

2.8 Interviewees were offered confidentiality unless cases of malpractice were identified or children and young people were considered to be experiencing significant harm. Respondents were given access to the study outline that included information on confidentiality and ethical considerations. Ethical approval was given by the Institute of Applied Social Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bedfordshire. Except where specifically sanctioned by the area concerned, comments included in the report have been anonymised, and the areas have not been identified. A coding system has been used to reference quotations. The prefix letter indicates the agency represented by the interviewee: P=police; C=children's services (statutory); V= children's services (voluntary); O=other. All data has been protected and will be shredded or destroyed following completion of the work.

Monitoring

2.9 Monitoring the progress of the exercise has been undertaken by an advisory group comprising representatives of the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Department for Children, Schools and Families, CPS, Association of Chief Police Officers, the UKHTC, CEOP and the University of Bedfordshire.

Findings and glossary

2.10 The findings from the twenty areas, plus contributions from policy leads, are reflected in sections 3 – 7 of this report. The themes selected from the analysis of the qualitative data form the structure and they are supported by selected quotations from individual practitioners' perceptions and understanding. References to source material, other than data from the scoping exercise, are included at the end of the report. A glossary of the frequently used acronyms is below:

ABE	Achieving Best Evidence
ACPC	Area Child Protection Committee (now LSCB)
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
CAMHS	Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services
CEOP	Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre
COMPACT	Community Policing and Case Tracking System
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
DAT	Drug Action Team
HMIC	Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary
LSCB	Local Safeguarding Children Board
MAPPA	Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
MARAC	Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences
NWG	National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People
PPU	Public Protection Units
PSHE	Personal Social and Health Education
RSHO	Risk of Sexual Harm Order
SCIP	Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution
SEF	Sex Education Forum
SOPO	Sex Offence Prevention Orders
UKHTC	United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre
VVAPP	Victims of Violence and Abuse Prevention Programme

3 A multi-agency approach

- in many areas there was evidence of a lack of focus on the proactive investigation of the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation. Child protection units have been traditionally reactive but the move to inclusion in the work of PPU's is helping to develop a more proactive approach (3.3)
- recognising the link between missing children and vulnerability to sexual exploitation enhances the criminal justice response (3.5)
- raising the priority of investigating child sexual exploitation is likely to require resources as well as reorganisation (3.5)
- an appropriate allocation of resources to child sexual exploitation is likely to require the introduction of relevant performance indicators (3.5)
- the involvement of voluntary sector specialist projects in multi-agency partnerships is invaluable for the delivery of intervention packages but requires the support of the LSCB (3.5)
- the most robust organisational response is a dedicated unit with co-located staff (3.6)
- in other models the development of a virtual team and the appointment/identification of a child sexual exploitation coordinator supports effective partnership working (3.6)

Why is a proactive approach required?

3.1 The ACPO prostitution strategy notes that *'the covert nature of many aspects of prostitution-related crimes, especially those related to child prostitution ... and trafficking will rarely reveal themselves through passive techniques.'*¹⁹ Ensuring that there is a response to concerns at an early stage can be key to gathering evidence as well as preventing children and young people from moving from 'at risk' to greater involvement in exploitative relationships. Working with young victims is much harder once they have become entrenched in an exploitative relationship, and may be 'trapped' by a crack or heroin habit. Taking a proactive approach and intervening at an early stage is the most effective approach, and may prevent further harm, but it requires dedicated staff focusing specifically on sexual exploitation and on the delivery of an effective multi-agency response. This was not always in place. Over half of the areas described their response as largely or wholly reactive.

How are local agencies responding to child sexual exploitation?

3.2 Traditionally child sexual exploitation did not fit with ACPC procedures which were: *'all about familial abuse or abuse in care homes.'*^(C-K2) Similarly, it did not fit with the work of vice units unless there was a clear link with formal prostitution, nor with Family Support Units which, in at least one area, *'limited themselves to familial abuse and left everything else to uniform. Uniform had no experience so just crimed it and made no contact with the child protection team.'*^(C-C1) This fragmented response is beginning to change through the development of Public Protection Units (PPUs). The HMIC inspection on protecting vulnerable people identified four strands of work to be included under the umbrella of public protection: the investigation and prevention of child abuse, domestic abuse, missing persons and monitoring sex offenders.²⁰ The report did not explicitly consider child sexual exploitation as part of child abuse but, in the context of developing practice, included a reference to Lancashire Police and their involvement in the Awaken Project in Blackpool:

¹⁹ Association of Chief Police Officers (2004)

²⁰ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (2008)

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The Awaken project – child sexual exploitation

Problem: Following a major missing persons enquiry in November 2004 the Awaken Project was established with police, social services and health services to jointly finance and resource a specialist team to tackle child sexual exploitation issues from both a reactive and investigative perspective, and also a safeguarding of children perspective.

What is the impact of developing Public Protection Units?

3.3 Child protection units have been traditionally reactive. The move to a wider remit could lead to a more proactive approach by facilitating the sharing of information on offenders as well as victims and helping to identify, at an early stage, the multiple issues affecting a vulnerable child or young person. Strengthening links with work on missing young people can be particularly advantageous. Not all runaways are victims of sexual exploitation but the act of running away increases their vulnerability. It may also be symptomatic. Young people run away for a reason, and that reason may relate to sexual exploitation. One area reported that *'many referrals come from the missing child worker – this is the most common early sign.'*^(C-J1) In the same area: *'linking the child sexual exploitation with the misper [missing persons] work has been key. We use the team flexibly so that, if a child goes missing, they will all be diverted into finding that child. We then work with our partners to tackle the cause – links to gangs, drugs etc – and try to prevent further missing episodes and reduce their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.'*^(P-J2)

3.4 Following the Children's Society review of provision for missing children, *Stepping Up*,²¹ the need for a better coordinated response, both nationally and locally, has been recognised. The report found that twice as many local authorities fail to plan for the needs of runaways as those who do and, although most had protocols for those missing from care, half of the authorities included in the review had no protocol for managing cases of children missing from home. The report also found that 40% of police forces were unable to access sufficient data to be able to establish the needs of missing children. Most of the review's consultees felt that LSCBs should lead on the runaway/missing children issue. It seems to be an appropriate time to consider how this work is linked to safeguarding strategies, and specifically to work on sexual exploitation.

What are the resource implications?

3.5 In some areas research²² has informed the development of local protocols based on three stages of risk. These stages can be characterised as sexualised risk taking; 'swapping' sexual favours; and entrenchment in an exploitative relationship.²³ However, ten areas suggested that risk assessments follow resources rather than the other way around, leading to intervention in high risk cases only. Burdens on children's services have been alleviated in eight areas where there are voluntary sector specialist projects delivering intervention packages. However, voluntary sector funding is often insecure and tensions can exist between statutory and non-governmental services. The pioneering role of the voluntary sector was widely praised - *'if it wasn't for Barnardo's we would all still be just sitting here expressing concern'*^(C-J1) – but their work inevitably means a stronger focus on the needs of

²¹ The Children's Society (2008)

²² Pearce et al (2002)

²³ The risk assessment cycle is set out more fully in [appendix D](#)

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exploited children and young people. This requires support and intervention from LSCBs and this *'increases their problems and their caseload.'* ^(V-H1)

3.6 For the police, twelve areas reported that child sexual exploitation is now included in the remit of their PPU but as a low priority. This was often attributed to the lack of evidence when the case is first referred: *'there are so many other forms of child abuse to think about – familial abuse, neglect, emotional abuse – exploitation tends to get lost because the information is so poor.'* ^(P-C3) It was also viewed as a 'new' issue with no new resources: *'we daren't lift up the stone because we don't know how we will deal with what we might find.'* ^(P-O2) All areas cited resources as a barrier to progress: *'the biggest problem is that young people do not admit to sexual exploitation to the police and we don't have the resources to go out looking for it.'* ^(P-C3) New resources, many areas felt, would not be made available while other issues were prioritised through performance indicators: *'the biggest issue is that the Home Office needs to get over its obsession with performance indicators. The real issues we should be tackling are violence and sexual violence. They are high profile issues when a case occurs but not when the staff are being allocated.'* ^(P-P4)

How have LSCBs responded to child sexual exploitation?

3.7 Considerable variance was found in the levels of commitment and partnership models that have been developed:

- **dedicated units and teams (6/20)**

In a few areas a committed and creative approach to child sexual exploitation has been developed as a response to a serious case, often involving a child death. In three areas a dedicated multi-disciplinary team of trained practitioners works from the same location, engaged jointly in early intervention to safeguard children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation and in the proactive investigation of perpetrators. Evidence of the successful disruption and prosecution of offenders suggests that a dedicated unit with co-located staff is the most robust response. Close working relationships increase the ability of police officers to adopt a 'softer' approach to their interactions with children and young people, and help children's services to develop a more robust approach to the gathering of evidence. However, where co-location has not been considered possible or appropriate, the appointment by the LSCB of a child sexual exploitation coordinator, or the existence of a *de facto* focal point (often a specialist project), also supports effective partnership working.

Where a specialist unit, or a coordinated team, is in place, specific protocols or unit guidelines have been developed to support an approach based on proactive investigation through early intervention. Typically they set out thresholds for intervention, the processes to be followed and the responsibilities of each agency, with the requirement that those responsibilities be delivered by suitably trained staff. These areas were keen to ensure that they did not duplicate child protection arrangements but enabled the victim to be linked into the necessary services without being subjected to repeated assessments. It was also considered crucial to minimise burdens on stretched staff: *'we won't necessarily hold a child protection conference It's quite well contained in the sexual exploitation conference. If you repeat meetings it starts getting difficult to get people to come along.'* ^(C-J1)

- **a temporary or limited operation (8/20)**

Many areas were struggling to gain support locally for a dedicated unit or coordinated team. Often a more temporary or limited operation has been set up,

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or is planned, to kick-start proactive investigations: *'we have to be realistic. We need to develop slowly so that we learn what we are doing as we go along. We might achieve Awaken by stealth.'* ^(C-C4) Another view of the proposal was less positive: *'the plan is to appoint an individual. We would have preferred a team but, without current referrals, we can't justify it although we know that, as soon as the individual starts awareness raising, the referrals will come in and we will then need a team.'* ^(C-C1) In some areas the arrangements developed in a more *ad hoc* way, often from one individual assuming the role of child sexual exploitation officer. Evidence suggests that these individuals have been extremely effective in developing partnerships and providing a focus for the early identification of children and young people at risk but that they can be overwhelmed by the number of referrals generated if there is no infrastructure to provide them with an appropriate level of support: *'we now have a formal arrangement but there is no money to support it'* ^(P-H1)

Many areas are working to a protocol which reflects the advice in the current SCIP guidance. They are awaiting the revised guidance in order to update local arrangements.

- **no specific arrangement (6/20)**

In other areas there are no specific arrangements in place and local partnerships rely on the safeguarding protocol to ensure a child protection response. This may be appropriate in rural areas, or other areas where the caseload is low: *'if we had systems in place they would be used so infrequently that people would not be familiar with them. For an area with low level activity we could use trained officers in a neighbouring BCU [Basic Command Unit] to whom we could have access as required.'* ^(O-T2) However, even in such areas, protocols need to be adapted to ensure intervention as soon as the child is assessed as 'at risk' and to ensure a focus on the perpetrator. For most of these areas the lack of dedicated and trained staff, and the inability to take a proactive response to sexual exploitation, was a cause of significant frustration.

3.8 Local arrangements should reflect local need but it is important for LSCBs to be wary of assumptions based on a historic level of referrals since they may reflect a historic lack of awareness among referring agencies. Most areas reported that their local knowledge was poor and felt that the current number of referrals was just the tip of the iceberg. It is important not to assume that lack of knowledge means a lack of exploitation taking place, and to actively enquire into the nature and extent of the problem before drawing conclusions. Three areas have recently commissioned scoping studies. In two of those areas the studies were conducted by Barnardo's who use a set of proxy indicators based on the vulnerability of children and young people:

- missing persons data
- unauthorised school absences
- fixed term and permanent exclusions from school
- not in education, employment or training figures
- under 18 conception rates
- substance possession offences
- looked after children

Future work on the development of offender profiles could help to develop these proxy indicators to include offender-related factors.

4 The foundation for effective evidence gathering

- information sharing protocols based on child protection are likely to require adaptation to meet the needs of early intervention and investigation in cases of child sexual exploitation (4.1)
- identifying risk factors and addressing them through early intervention demonstrates care for the young victim and builds trust to enable exploitation to be challenged (4.3)
- specialist agencies, particularly if seen to be non-statutory, are well placed to build trusting relationships with young victims and their parents and carers (4.4)
- providing support from first referral to post conviction, including beyond age 18 where required, can prevent re-victimisation and is more likely to be provided by a non-statutory specialist agency (4.4)
- a child sexual exploitation coordinator, working with points of contact in each agency, provides a focal point for collating information and has been a turning point for building successful cases against perpetrators (4.8)
- a wide range of agencies needs to be involved, including those who have not traditionally seen evidence gathering against perpetrators of child sexual exploitation as part of their role (4.9)
- support from the CPS to raise awareness about collecting and preserving information in an evidentially viable way can be crucial to building a sound prosecution case (4.13)
- data collection systems for missing persons can be useful for collating information on child sexual exploitation (4.14)
- intelligence systems not only support individual investigations but also enable areas to map local activity to identify 'hotspots' and other common factors and contribute to a national picture of trends (4.15)

Are there protocols for sharing information?

4.1 Protocols for sharing information for child protection purposes are widely used to support work on child sexual exploitation. However, at present, most areas work to a high threshold for intervention (see 3.5 above). Moving to a proactive approach is likely to require adaptation to those protocols to ensure that they include guidance on information gathering at the early stages of exploitation and recognise the need for all agencies to cooperate with the investigation, including those that have been identified in some areas as reluctant: *'the police must rely on information from all our partner agencies if we are to bring cases against perpetrators. I'm afraid this is a new idea to them.'* (P-12)

What information is shared?

4.2 Small pieces of information, insignificant on their own, can be vital to the building of a case. The information that those with close contact with the young victim can provide typically relates to patterns of behaviour, including incidences of staying away from home, how they appeared on return (distressed, dishevelled, drunk), associates (names, nicknames, car registration details, telephone numbers) and information the young person may have disclosed about 'friends', 'boyfriends', risky behaviour and criminal acts, including sexual activity without consent or (for those over 16) where coercion is involved. This kind of information is more likely to be disclosed to those offering support to a young person than from the police, although there was evidence that it is sometimes disclosed to 'trusted' officers including sexual exploitation or missing person coordinators.

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Why is support for the young victim relevant to challenging offenders?

4.3 One of the reasons that this information is infrequently disclosed directly to the police is that, in many instances, sexual exploitation is not recognised by those who are its victims. Children and young people in exploitative relationships are likely to have been manipulated rather than explicitly coerced. This makes them feel complicit. Fourteen areas reported that helping a young person to recognise the exploitative nature of their situation can be a long process: *'they feel that it's the law that is wrong, not them. They have been indoctrinated and mistake sex for affection.'*^(O-H2) Thirteen areas considered that demonstrating care for the young person can build the trust needed to help the young person through the process of recognition. This means that identifying risk factors, and working to address them, is an integral part of the process of gathering evidence. The approach in specialist projects (such as those run by Barnardo's, NSPCC and the smaller voluntary agencies supported through the NWG) and in dedicated units is based on the acknowledgement that engaging with the young person is of paramount importance to keep them safe and also to facilitate the gathering of evidence: *'the police allow us to manage the situation and manage their links with the young person. The police understand that this eventually delivers more intelligence.'*^(C-A1) Early interventions mainly relate to ensuring physical safety and well-being: *'generally we begin with sexual health work and building relationships with the young person. This will often then lead to a disclosure.'*^(C-A1)

Who provides support?

4.4 In the dedicated units included in the scoping exercise the support role is undertaken by the units' children's service staff. In other areas it generally depends on the nature of previous and existing relationships between the young person and different agencies. Young victims may have been warned by perpetrators not to seek, or accept, help and may have been encouraged in the belief that the police are only interested in criminalising them – for drugs offences, or for loitering or soliciting (still available 'as a last resort' for those under 18). Some young people have a poor history with children's services and may not willingly seek their help. Research shows that specialist agencies, particularly if they are seen to be non-statutory, are often better placed to build trusting relationships with children and young people, and also with their parents and carers.²⁴ Specialist agencies are also most likely to be sufficiently flexible to provide support from first referral to post conviction to minimise the risk of re-victimisation, including beyond age 18 where required.

What is the role of support staff?

4.5 The scoping exercise found good examples of specialist support for those at risk of child sexual exploitation. They will normally work with those already providing services, and advocate for the young person to receive whatever other practical and emotional support they may need. Barnardo's report a model of intervention based on four levels of provision: Access, Attention, Assertive Outreach and Advocacy. Working together through each of the four stages ensures effective outcomes for young people and this approach has been endorsed in the evaluation of Barnardo's work.²⁵ The NWG advocates therapeutic outreach with young people at all stages in the risk assessment.²⁶ It can help them to understand the physical and emotional dangers of their activities through regular and intensive contact with a key worker. This provides them with advice and guidance, and also with reassurance that they are supported. Efforts are also made to try to engage young people in diversionary activities to 'replace' the activities that may be placing them at risk. Where

²⁴ Scott and Harper (2006); Pearce (2007)

²⁵ Scott and Skidmore (2006)

²⁶ Pearce et al (2002) and see [appendix D](#)

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appropriate, the key worker will also work with parents and carers to promote positive and healthy relationships, and help them to set clear boundaries for acceptable behaviour.

4.6 Sectors and agencies identified as having a key support role include:

- **health** Ten areas commented that young people at risk of sexual exploitation are likely to be in touch with health services before they come into contact with the police. This could be sexual health services (genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinics and sexual health outreach workers); mental health services, (primarily Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)); or those addressing general physical health (including GPs, nurses providing a service for 'looked after' children (LAC nurses) and Accident and Emergency departments). The cooperation of health service staff was widely valued and, in particular, GUM staff and LAC nurses were said to have built up considerable expertise in child sexual exploitation.

Health workers are often an integral part of dedicated child sexual exploitation teams. In other areas protocols with health workers have proved valuable in order to access, on the behalf of vulnerable young people, specialist health services. This is not always straightforward due to limited resources. In particular, areas commented on difficulties with accessing CAMHS: *'they have said recently that they have fewer resources so they can only offer intervention at level 4 – there is nothing for the lower, preventative level.'* (C-C1) As well as resource issues, there are other difficulties with accessibility: *'we try to refer to CAMHS but there is initially a 6 week waiting list then the door is closed on them if they miss an appointment and they have to start at the end of the waiting list again. We give them diaries and text them to remind them about appointments but they are very chaotic.'* (O-H2)

- **Drug Action Team (DAT) and drug project workers** Given the interdependent relationship between the use of drugs and alcohol in child sexual exploitation, developing addictions may be the first indication that a young person is in difficulty. In such cases addressing substance misuse will be a key part of the support action plan. Despite this only three areas mentioned the involvement of DAT workers. This needs addressing in future government drug and alcohol plans.
- **education** Ten areas felt that teachers and other staff have an important role given their close regular contact with young people. Many 'at risk' young people will be absent from school. In one area *'the missing from home coordinator has a protocol with local schools to treat an absent pupil as missing rather than truanting so that action can be taken straightaway.'* (C-A1) This may be a helpful model provided that the structure of the unit/team provides for immediate action.

For those who have been out of education for some time, facilitating a return to learning will be a key element of a support action plan. In one area a specialist Educational Welfare Officer offers a learning package through joint work with the child sexual exploitation worker. The young person builds up a portfolio of work which is submitted for accreditation and also used for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.

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- **Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)** Five areas mentioned the role of YOTs: *'they make some of the most appropriate referrals.'* ^(C-J1) The ASSET assessment used by YOTs not only looks at the risk of re-offending and harm to others but also the vulnerability of the individual: *'the YOT would often be the first to discover a young person's vulnerability because social services now operate at a level of crisis intervention.'* ^(O-A2) This was borne out by other areas that reported that: *'when a young person is involved in sexual offences, the YOT will often tell us about the victim. We often haven't heard about it from anywhere else.'* ^(C-C1)
- **housing** Ensuring that the young person is in safe accommodation during the investigation was an issue mentioned explicitly in four areas.
- **other police units** While it was generally recognised that the police response should be primarily through child protection officers, the role of other units was frequently mentioned, including neighbourhood policing teams, street wardens and PCSOs. The British Transport Police were also mentioned where 'hotspots' were identified in and around bus and railway stations.
- **residential care workers and foster carers** The particular vulnerability of 'looked after' children, and the targeting of care homes and some foster care placements, was widely mentioned. The ACPO Guidance on investigating missing persons recognises that: *'children who go missing from their care placements account for the greatest proportion of the missing person reports received by the police.'* ²⁷ It goes on to advise that: *'it should not ... be assumed that risk diminishes because of the frequency of absence. ... Being 'streetwise' can make them particularly vulnerable because of the types of areas they are likely to frequent and also because their judgement about the levels of risk are likely to be poor.'* The role of residential care workers was praised in one area for reporting concerns about exploitation, working with young people to try to stabilise them, and keeping records for use in the prosecution of perpetrators. To spread this good practice the regular care plan review process should incorporate consideration of sexual exploitation and evidence of potential abuse and of going missing.

4.7 Sexual exploitation was described as endemic in care homes. Research²⁸ has also shown that a disproportionately high number of sexually exploited young people has experienced violence in the family home and/or disrupted care histories. However, a couple of areas were keen to stress that victims of sexual exploitation are not always in care - *'of the first 60 children referred less than half were in care'* ^(C-J1) - and a number of areas have begun to do significant work with parents so that, wherever appropriate, young people can stay with their families. In the past some parents have not been involved in the safeguarding process as they may have been seen as complicit in child abuse but, where the parent or carer is not involved in the exploitation or allowing it to happen, they have a major role to play in supporting the young person: *'we encourage workers to put time in with the family to encourage them to reinforce the idea that the child is a victim so that there may come a time when the child is willing to talk.'* ^(V-E1) Specific support for parents is also available through CROP's Parent Support Unit. ²⁹

²⁷ Association of Chief Police Officers (2005)

²⁸ Scott and Skidmore (2006)

²⁹ www.crop1.org.uk

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How is the sharing of information coordinated?

4.8 In order to gather evidence effectively all partner agencies need to understand the type of information, intelligence and evidence that can be useful, and the process for collating that information. Where a child sexual exploitation coordinator, or a central point of contact, has been identified, this has proved to be a turning point for gathering information and building successful cases against the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation: *'we have information where we have a dedicated coordinator, and none where there is no-one and no resources to collect it.'* ^(C-B1)

What happens when concerns are raised?

4.9 Fifteen areas reported that strategy meetings are used as a forum for sharing information. Two areas commented that it is crucial to ensure that agencies attend these meetings and bring with them all information relevant to the action plan, and to the investigation. One protocol requires that *'written information from each agency outlining its involvement, knowledge of the child and its circumstances and knowledge of any risks in relation to sexual exploitation should be provided to the Quality Assessment Unit at least a day before the meeting.'* Frustration over attendance and readiness to share information prompted two areas to go so far as to suggest that the process should be statutory, as with MAPPA meetings, to ensure that all relevant agencies are properly involved, including those who have not traditionally seen evidence gathering against perpetrators of child sexual exploitation as part of their role.

4.10 Education and health were mentioned in all areas as agencies that needed to be involved in strategy meetings, and likely to be among the first to spot risk indicators. However, some areas reported difficulties in securing their attendance and strategic involvement. One area commented that health agencies work to a higher level of confidentiality and that this had been a barrier to safeguarding young people from sexual exploitation. Another area commented that some agencies, including drug and alcohol workers: *'tend to think that issues of consent are not relevant to those over 16 and so do not see them as victims of crime.'* ^(P-12)

4.11 Information sharing relies on trust and respect. In some areas specialist projects have built up information which, once cleansed and checked against criminal intelligence systems, has proved so significant that a problem profile has been developed and a major investigation instigated. It is important for the police and CPS to encourage information gathering and manage expectations among those passing on information. This requires an open dialogue throughout the investigation. One area commented that: *'although, in principle, all agencies are involved in gathering evidence, in fact the police do not always share information about the progress of the investigation to enable us to do so effectively.'* ^(V-J3)

4.12 Forums for sharing information mostly focus on the child or young person. In one area routine meetings tracking progress on victims tended to replicate discussions at child protection meetings but proved to be more useful when the focus moved to suspected perpetrators. Another area: *'agreed to follow recent MAPPA guidance³⁰ in respect of those who may not be registered sex offenders but who are causing us concern.'* ^(P-12) As part of its *Action Plan for Tackling Violence* ³¹ the government is committed to rolling out Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) nationally to ensure that local agencies work positively and proactively together to reduce repeat victimisation among domestic violence victims. Research

³⁰ Home Office (2007)

³¹ Home Office (2008)

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suggests that bringing intervention techniques to disrupt and prevent domestic violence could also helpfully inform child protection processes with sexually exploited children and young people.³² MARACs may provide a model that could be adopted for safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation.

How are agencies helped to collect and preserve information?

4.13 Achieving accurate and consistent recording of information has been a real challenge: *'reports can be a nightmare because they are not always dated and timed, and sources are not always identified.'*^(C-E1) This is beginning to be addressed: *'we have now arranged for the staff to go to the [force] central intelligence unit to see the way in which they record intelligence in a viable way.'*^(V-G3) In another area the CPS is helping the local partnership to develop guidance to ensure that professionals:

- accurately record what they have seen as soon as possible after the event
- record sufficient details
- retain records safely so that they can be produced at a later date
- secure physical evidence
- provide professional witness statements, and
- attend court to give evidence.

How is information recorded?

4.14 In many areas information has been passed on verbally at a strategy meeting and only ever recorded in the minutes. Most areas recognised the need to move to a better system for preserving information on a searchable database, accessible to key personnel in partner agencies. Much of the information received is unlikely to be in the form of criminal intelligence and the police are understandably reluctant to put 'soft information' onto force criminal intelligence systems. However, systems in use for missing persons data would suit that purpose. Many forces now use COMPACT (Community Policing and Case Tracking System) or a similar database to record information and intelligence on missing persons. Information that indicates trafficking or other forms of sexual exploitation can be flagged for the attention of the child sexual exploitation coordinator. The same database could be used for the 'soft information' collated as part of sexual exploitation investigations.

4.15 Better recording systems will not only support individual investigations but enable areas to map local activity to identify 'hotspots' so that investigative resources can be targeted, and to establish links between locations, victims and offenders. It can also be used to spot trends in terms of *modus operandi* and help to build victim and offender profiles.

³² Schutt (2006); Pearce (2006)

5 Developing a disruption plan

- coercive relationships are difficult to dislodge without a disruption plan (5.1)
- abduction warnings can be an effective way to sever contact between victims and perpetrators (5.2)
- there is scope for greater use of police powers and court orders including SOPOs and RSHOs (5.2)
- there is scope for increasing cooperation with other enforcement agencies to disrupt the process of exploitation (5.3)

Is disruption considered to be a valuable approach?

5.1 Some areas were frustrated that the ambitions of criminal justice agencies did not extend beyond disrupting the activities of those believed to be involved in the exploitation of children and young people: *'it feels like dumbing down.'*^(C-G1) However, while there should always be a proactive investigation to give the greatest evidential opportunity for bringing a prosecution, a disruption plan is extremely valuable and can prevent further harm. Coercive relationships are difficult to dislodge without such a plan: *'if we don't do this it appears that nothing is happening. The young person continues to feel complicit whereas disruption activity gradually shows them that something wrong is going on. And the same for the perpetrators – they don't just feel that they can carry on regardless.'*^(V-L1)

What disruptive methods are being used by the police?

5.2 A number of ways were identified for the police to deter a suspected perpetrator from contact with the children or young people thought to be victims, or potential victims:

- **observation** Most areas undertake observations as part of the investigative strategy. Many areas found it difficult to justify covert surveillance but would make visits to ensure that the alleged perpetrator was aware that concerns were being investigated. In some cases this proved to be enough of a deterrent as *'once they know they are being watched they move on'*^(O-T2)
- **Child Abduction Act 1984** In some cases a more formal warning is required. Where the young person is under 16, the disruption tool most commonly mentioned was section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984. It is an offence for a person not connected to the young person (not a parent or carer) to take them away 'without lawful authority.' The usual procedure is to remove the young person to a place of safety and issue a formal warning to the perpetrator. This does not require a complaint to have been made by the young person but does require a statement from the parent/carer. Thirteen areas reported that they frequently used this approach and found it to be highly effective in severing contact between the young person and their exploiter
- **Sex Offence Prevention Orders (SOPOs)** The police can apply for a SOPO if the offender already has a conviction or a caution for a relevant sexual or violent offence and is considered to pose a risk of sexual harm. Although a couple of areas commented that SOPOs *'required too much evidence'*^(C-G3), four areas have been using them successfully

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- **Risk of Sexual Harm Orders (RSHOs)** These orders are available in respect of individuals with no previous convictions for a sexual or violent offence but who, on at least two occasions, engaged in sexually explicit conduct or communication with a child and may pose a risk of further harm. Despite the relatively low level of evidence required only one area mentioned their use
- **investigating other forms of criminality, including immigration offences** Areas actively investigating perpetrators usually look for evidence of other criminal activity. Criminal acts can often be an integral part of the exploitative process, such as the supply of alcohol and drugs to children and young people
- **checking immigration status** Where an individual's immigration status is uncertain police can liaise with the UK Border and Immigration Agency to consider deportation or administrative removal
- **money laundering** Where the disruption of organised crime is a consideration police can investigate and charge offences of money laundering to seize and confiscate assets acquired as a result of criminal activity.³³

What disruptive methods are being used by other agencies?

5.3 In a number of areas local partnerships have begun working with a range of agencies to try to disrupt exploitative behaviour. Most commonly this includes:

- **licensing inspectors** There were examples of using licensing laws to close pubs frequented by underage drinkers, where drugs and alcohol were being supplied, or where young people were being sexually exploited. Other areas have worked with licensing inspectors to remove licenses from taxis used to facilitate sexual exploitation
- **Housing Enforcement Officers** Seven areas have begun to work with Housing Enforcement Officers to evict those whose exploitative behaviour makes them unsuitable tenants. The process of enforcing tenancies and evictions has also led to the discovery of exploitative situations that had not previously been the subject of referrals.

The examples given by a number of areas in the scoping exercise suggest that there is significant scope for increasing work with other agencies to disrupt exploiters. However, those areas with some experience of this approach have also reported on the necessity of ensuring that licensing, housing and other enforcement officers receive awareness raising/training to enable them to respond appropriately.

What disruptive methods are being used by those supporting young people?

5.4 Part of the disruption plan focuses on the young person and their contact with adults suspected of being involved in sexual exploitation, or with peers suspected of introducing them to adults involved in sexual exploitation. It usually falls to support agencies, particularly specialist services, to try to help the young person to move away from exploitative relationships. This is an intrinsic part of the support process and is as important at the early stages of a potentially exploitative relationship as it is when there is an established exploitative relationship.

³³ sections 327-329 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

6 Preparing a prosecution case

- sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse but it raises unique issues as it involves particularly challenging young people who often do not recognise the coercive nature of their relationships (6.3)
- creative investigation techniques help to corroborate the evidence of chaotic and/or reluctant young victims and witnesses (6.3)
- a key worker approach provides the best support for young people during the investigation and prosecution process (6.4)
- more effective outcomes are achieved where there is an early meeting between the police and the CPS (6.7)
- child sexual exploitation strategies can be strengthened by discussing with the CPS how to integrate their policy on prosecuting criminal cases involving children and young people (6.9)

What legislation is being used against perpetrators of child sexual exploitation?

6.1 All areas welcomed the framework of new offences in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 although there are still relatively few convictions under that Act – *'this still seems to be very rare outside Awaken.'*^(V-J3) There are a number of related offences which should also be considered alongside the 2003 Act, including the abduction offence considered as part of disruption plans in section 5.2. An effective approach is to *'build intelligence around the individual then look for evidence. We continue to gather evidence from each of the young people involved, and on known associates, before we speak to the offender.'*^(C-A1) This provides a broad intelligence picture to enable the police to consider the most serious offences that could be supported by the evidence. Appendix A sets out some of the key offences to be considered.

How are cases progressed when there are regional issues?

6.2 Current knowledge about the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation suggests that they are commonly involved in a number of areas of criminality which often extends beyond local and sometimes national boundaries. Areas have mentioned serious offences including drugs and firearms offences. It is crucial that cooperation extends not only to local partnerships but also between police force units, and between different regions. There did not seem to be protocols for identifying which force will investigate cases where activity takes place in more than one police force area: *'we tend to stick to investigating local crimes.'*^(P-K1) Also, within each force, there should be clarity as to who will lead each investigation according to the apparent level of complexity. Where there is knowledge or suspicion that a number of children or young people are involved together, or being controlled by the same person, there is likely to be a need to apply complex (organised or multiple) abuse procedures.

How is the reluctance of young people to make a complaint addressed?

6.3 Special consideration needs to be given to the conduct of the investigation in recognition of the fact that victims' lives can be chaotic. It may be some time before they are ready to give an account of their experiences or make an Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interview.³⁴ Sometimes their accounts or recollection may be inconsistent or they may be retracted as a result of intimidation or because the young person is dependent on the perpetrator. It is unlikely to be a speedy process and requires all agencies to adopt child-friendly practices. Some interviewees felt

³⁴ Home Office (2000)

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uncomfortable about the role of the young person: *'often a child doesn't want to make a complaint. It's a big ask and puts the responsibility on them rather than on the perpetrator.'*^(P-G2) Many areas felt it important to consider investigative techniques that will corroborate their evidence so that the burden does not fall solely on the child to achieve a conviction: *'we have to find another way. We have to think smarter - not just us, all the agencies.'* Some areas also suggested that serious consideration should be given to ways to achieve a victimless prosecution through the introduction of specialist courts and similar innovations to those recently developed to support witnesses in domestic abuse cases.

How are young victims supported through the investigative process?

6.4 Few areas were actively taking forward prosecutions so that only eight had arrangements or protocols in place to support young people through that process. The majority had no clear procedures to ensure the best interests of the child or young person: *'we are not as joined up as we might be in terms of offering support.'*^(C-T1) The arrangements are significantly clearer where support is already in place through a key worker: *'they will talk to us in relaxed circumstances. What is required is intensive work with them over a period of time and then, when they are ready, they need to be taken there and then for an ABE interview.'*^(P-H2) This implies a need for trained staff and some flexibility in the way in which the staff are deployed.

6.5 Every effort should be made to reduce the number of 'professionals' to whom the young person needs to give an account of their experiences, and the number of investigative interviews that the young person needs to undergo. This also helps to ensure a consistent account of the young victim's experiences. One area reported on a recent rape case which, because it involved child abuse, drugs and a range of other criminal offences *'led to multiple interviews.'*^(C-E1) In that case *'it was also difficult for her parents to keep in touch with progress as there was no-one in overall control who could act as a central point of contact. This was not a good situation for a 13 year old child who was 'wobbling' anyway about her court appearance.'*^(C-E1) It would be helpful for protocols to include guidance on primacy in such cases and to ensure child friendly practices wherever possible: *'we [specialist agency] are looking to be trained as nominated officers so that we can do joint interviews with the police where appropriate. Sometimes young people don't trust social workers.'*^(V-L1)

6.6 Where there has been a sexual assault decisions need to be made, involving the child or young person, about the requirement for a medical examination. This is made easier where there is a one-stop shop approach: *'some young people are too tired or unwilling at the time to undergo an examination. But they can come back to a familiar place where there is less stress for them and we can negotiate what they are prepared to undergo.'*^(O-P4) These services are becoming increasingly available for children in Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) but the scoping exercise also included two other types of dedicated child protection centre which were not SARCs (and so did not benefit from SARC funding) but which provided examples of good practice.

What is the role of the CPS?

6.7 Most areas commented that they were still struggling to prepare cases that the CPS would be willing to take forward. A common perception was that the *'CPS takes the approach that they will withdraw a case at the first sight of a potential problem.'*^(P-O2) By contrast, in those areas with dedicated teams, expertise in preparing cases had been developed from the experience of a number of successful cases, and a strong relationship had been built between the investigative teams and the CPS. This was enormously advantageous.

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How can CPS assist with case preparation?

6.8 Seeking an early meeting, or case conference, with the CPS to discuss how to build a successful case helps to focus the investigation effectively. Evidential avenues explored included:

- **forensic evidence** Finding ways to corroborate evidence that may be weak or contradictory by virtue of the chaotic situations that the perpetrators have created for their victims, for example through telephone and computer records, DNA evidence on bedding, clothing etc
- **hearsay/third party evidence** Working with agencies to provide corroborative evidence relating to incidents witnessed and statements made to third parties
- **focussing on the offender** Ensuring a detailed investigation of the offender including:

financial investigations *‘Proceeds of crime is a big area - we are starting to address this by looking into telephone calls, production letters for bank accounts etc’* ^(P-B2)

bad character, including other offences *‘The girls often give us information on drugs houses.’* ^(P-B2) Links have been identified with drugs offences, gun crime and other serious offences

sharing information across boundaries The scoping exercise came across examples of evidence against a perpetrator in one area, including breach of abduction warnings, used as bad character evidence in another area.

How can CPS help with supporting victims?

6.9 Many of the issues facing young victims and witnesses are addressed in CPS policy guidance on prosecuting cases involving children and young people as victims and witnesses.³⁵ The aspirations of this policy did not always seem to be part of local practice. It would be helpful for LSCBs to discuss with local CPS prosecutors how this policy can be delivered locally as part of a child sexual exploitation investigative strategy, including:

- **preparing the child or young person for the trial process** One area warned that: *‘if a child has a bad time in court, word gets around and others will not be prepared to go through the same.’* ^(O-C2) The same area also spoke of: *‘lots of horror stories about young people becoming insignificant to the process after the ABE interview. They are not told about progress until suddenly they are called to court.’* ^(O-C2) However this can be overcome through the support of key workers: *‘we keep young people constantly in touch with progress, even if this means that we have to provide them with a mobile phone. We also give them practical support or else they are likely to give up.’* ^(C-A1) A dedicated witness service can also be involved to address anxieties, familiarise the child and any other young witnesses with the court, and accompany them to the trial

³⁵ Crown Prosecution Service (2006)

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- **ensuring the young person can give their evidence** There were some concerns about the need to assess at an early stage the kind of difficulties that the young witness is likely to encounter and to engage with a child witness support scheme, where available, to overcome those difficulties: *'they might have problems with attention span or in expressing themselves. No assessment is made so the case collapses when CPS see that they don't appear to be able to perform in the courtroom. But it would have been perfectly possible to address those problems if an assessment had been done at an early stage.'*^(O-C2) Prosecutors are now able to interview witnesses at a pre-trial interview to assess the reliability or clarify a witness's evidence. It also gives the prosecutor the opportunity to assist him or her in understanding complex evidence or for the purposes of explaining the process and procedures. However, this can only happen in cases where the victim or witness is over 18 years of age
- **special measures** Once the prosecutor has decided that there is sufficient evidence to prosecute and that it will be in the interests of justice to do so, there are a number of other ways in which their role can help a child or young person to give their best evidence. On the advice of the police as to which measure is most appropriate for the victim the CPS will apply for special measures. Special measures are now available for witnesses of any age. Where special measures are agreed it will be usual for evidence to be video-recorded and for a live link to be used. Additional measures can include the use of screens, communication aids and clearing the public gallery (usual for sexual offences)
- **other measures** The CPS can also ask the court to make other special arrangements. The court will consider any difficulties faced by the young witness provided that it is brought to their attention. For example, the CPS can ask the court to make an order for reporting restrictions to ensure that the name of the child is not made public and that no pictures of the child or young person appear in the press or on television: *'on the day of the rape trial the local paper published her name and address on the front page and she ran away'*^(V-G3)
- **pre-trial therapy** *Speaking Up for Justice*³⁶ concluded that vulnerable and intimidated witnesses should be able to access emotional support and counselling both before and after the trial. This is a decision for the young person and his or her carers rather than for the CPS or the police although they should be informed and pre-trial therapy should always be given in line with current guidance.³⁷

How can CPS help during the trial?

6.10 One area commented that the court process can be abusive for the child witness. The CPS can object if the questioning of the child or young person becomes oppressive, and can challenge defence mitigation that unfairly attacks the child's character. In one area the dedicated unit has been able to discuss with the CPS common behaviour from victims, including the use of drugs and alcohol and the likelihood that he or she will continue to actively seek out the perpetrator. This has helped the prosecution to present a case which places the victim's behaviour in the context of the exploitative relationship rather than indicative of poor character. Many young witnesses will have criminal convictions and lifestyles which may mean that

³⁶ Home Office (1998)

³⁷ Crown Prosecution Service (2001)

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their credibility as victims/witnesses will be attacked. Again, early discussion with CPS as to how to address this – for example, through character witness statements – can overcome these difficulties.

How can the CPS help at the sentencing and post-conviction stage?

6.11 A number of areas have commented on what appear to be inconsistent and inappropriate sentencing in sexual exploitation cases. For example, *'a man found in bed with a 13 year old was given a community sentence.'*^(V-G3) The CPS has a role in advising the court on sentencing guidelines and on any aggravating factors that should be taken into account in the sentencing of the offender. And, although it appears that this was not done in the case quoted, the CPS can refer the case to the Attorney General who, if it is considered appropriate, will seek leave to refer the case to the Court of Appeal. This must be done within 28 days of sentencing.

6.12 Following a conviction the CPS can also make recommendations for further action or orders, as appropriate, including a recommendation for deportation, a request for a SOPO, a request for a compensation order, or a restraint or confiscation application under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

What interventions are available for offenders?

6.13 Interventions for offenders were not included within the remit of the scoping exercise. However, interviews with Youth Offending Team managers revealed that there are no interventions available in Young Offender Institutions for young people convicted of sex offences unless they are made available by the local authority: *'we spend a lot of money on interventions. If we had better assessments, we could probably identify low risk cases which we could deal with within the YOT.'*^(O-A2)

How do agencies prevent re-victimisation?

6.14 Support for the victims of child sexual exploitation goes far wider than traditional witness preparation. This scoping exercise has shown that best practice is for the support to begin with the first referral, continue through the gathering of evidence and carry on beyond any criminal proceedings to ensure that the young person continues to be safe and not re-victimised. However, post trial support only happens where there is a specialist project who would be working with the young person regardless of the trial. And, in many cases, that support would be age-limited. There was a real frustration that responsibility finishes at 18. Those areas with specialist services providing post-trial support made it clear that helping young people to move on in safety is not easy because the experience of exploitation means that: *'they have nothing in common with other young people of their age who have nothing so exciting to offer. By the time the excitement has begun to wear off they feel they have burned their boats with other people of their own age.'*^(O-H2) However the same interviewee also injected a more positive note: *'support needs to include a good exit strategy. They need to be encouraged to work towards training courses, college, or a work placement. They will drop out again if they don't turn their lives around. But it is possible – there have been some notable successes.'*^(O-H2)

7 Awareness raising, training and guidance

- training enhances professionals' direct involvement in child sexual exploitation work, developing a cadre of specialists (7.1)
- training helps to achieve better disruption and prosecution of those who sexually exploit children and young people (7.3)
- training those in contact with young people in a variety of settings ensures that they understand risk factors and routes for referring concerns, and aids identification, engagement, disruption and prosecution (7.6)
- raising awareness with young people about the risk of sexual exploitation enables them to strengthen their protective behaviours to minimise their vulnerability (7.8)
- awareness raising with the wider community enables everyone to be aware of the problem so that they can better protect vulnerable young people, and ensures that potential perpetrators understand the law and expect it to be applied rigorously (7.11)

What training is needed for those working with victims and offenders?

7.1 Most areas commented that training enhances professionals' direct involvement in child sexual exploitation work, developing a cadre of specialists to support the work locally and as part of recognised networks to ensure the sharing of information and expertise across boundaries. The point was made that awareness raising should reach those involved at all stages of the criminal justice process, and that a specialist response should also be introduced to those agencies

Why is there a continuing need for awareness raising?

7.2 Most of the areas were aware of different models of child sexual exploitation but did not always recognise them as a significant local problem. That is partly because of a lack of proactive investigation to identify the extent of the issue locally, but also because some agencies and individuals still persist with the view that young people themselves are the problem rather than perceiving them as victims of serious crime. The not uncommon frustrated comment of one individual was that *'there is always the danger that it is just perceived as poor behaviour.'* ^(C-K2) Although children under 16 cannot consent to sexual activity, and those under 18 cannot consent where sexual exploitation is involved, there continue to be perceptions of 'consent' which do not match the legal framework. This is not confined to frontline agencies. One area reported that in a sexual exploitation case that came before the courts a judge had commented about the case of a severely abused young woman that *'a young girl of 16 "could make her own decisions."* ^(V-L1) As one local protocol states: *'we need to constantly reinforce the fact that children do not make informed choices to become, or continue to be, sexually exploited but do so from coercion, enticement, manipulation or desperation.'*

What training is available?

7.3 The need for a cultural change was identified as a key challenge. For some the issue has been addressed through multi-agency training. This tends to be the case in areas where there is a well-established specialist project. Multi-agency training underpins partnership working, developing an approach to the task based on a joint understanding of each other's role, a respect for the delivery of that role, and regular communication. Areas variously commented that partnership working, although established through protocols and structures, can be undermined by poor communication. It is important that through formal and informal training, a shared understanding can be achieved so that mutual trust develops. However, valuable

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though this training may be, it is not delivered in any systematic way. Generally the availability of training was described as ‘a sore point’ as many areas were frustrated that they were not able to access formal training. Three areas mentioned that some staff had attended CEOP training and this was highly praised. No other national training was mentioned, and no other training has been identified that addresses investigation techniques relevant to child sexual exploitation cases.

7.4 The original intention of the scoping exercise had been to find out about training received. More often than not an answer was given that described training that the individual had delivered. For many the situation was that *‘we have had no formal training – we learn by being hands on’*^(O-H1) and *‘we’ve been making it up as we go along.’*^(C-J1) For further information, other than relying on the experience of colleagues, there seemed to be few places to turn: *‘we Google if we are looking for something special’*^(C-T1)

7.5 For the police, areas considered that training should be available to child sexual exploitation coordinators, and also to missing person coordinators. It was also considered that a module on child sexual exploitation should be built into existing child protection training. Modules on child sexual exploitation also need to be built into mainstream accredited child care, social work and health professional training programmes. Wherever possible, training should be accredited or developed with scope for it to lead to accredited training.

What training is needed for those working with young people?

7.6 There was widespread recognition that awareness raising and training for all those who come into contact with children and young people in a wide variety of settings (Including foster and residential carers) ensures that they understand risk factors and routes for referring concerns. This aids identification, engagement, disruption and prosecution. Where an individual has a more peripheral role, there is a need to assess the format of the training or guidance to ensure that it is both relevant and accessible. For example, some areas are developing basic awareness tools on risk factors and referral routes to encourage early identification and intervention. There were also examples of where training had been offered in a tailored way to specific groups as required. For example:

- **licensing inspectors** One area plans specific training for local licensing inspectors following unsatisfactory hearings relating to the involvement of taxi drivers in the sexual exploitation of young people
- **Housing Enforcement Officers** One area noted some unhelpful practices where action had been taken without any understanding of the issues related to child sexual exploitation: *‘they have undertaken enforcement action against tenants but not acted to safeguard young people or report the perpetrators’*^(V-L1) but the situation was successfully addressed through targeted training
- **GPs** One area provided dedicated training to GPs to show how early intervention with young people at risk of sexual exploitation involves screening to address a number of health issues, including teenage pregnancy and the spread of chlamydia and STIs. Another area reported that: *‘we now have a GP liaison officer who attends child protection meetings and has been putting basic information on laminated sheets to make it accessible for busy GPs’*^(O-C2)

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- **local authority employees** One area has provided a leaflet for all local authority employees attached to their payslip and providing basic information on the sexual exploitation of children and young people.

7.7 Within the police training tends to be limited to child protection officers but, again, some areas have found it beneficial to find ways to raise awareness with other officers including. Training of criminal justice agency staff and others who may interact with child victims is crucial to an appropriate response to the children and young people involved.

What action is needed to raise awareness among young people?

7.8 All areas considered that awareness raising with those potentially vulnerable, with key professionals and with all those who come into daily contact with children and young people, helps young people to develop protective behaviours. As part of the delivery of the prostitution strategy funding was provided for the development of guidance on addressing sexual exploitation within Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE).³⁸ A number of areas are involved in the delivery of PSHE in at least some of their schools. Other education programmes are also available (set out in [annex E](#)).

7.9 Concerns were commonly expressed about the vulnerability of looked after children and those leaving the care system, and the need to raise their resilience to sexual exploitation. Some interviewees expressed concerns about the level of corporate parenting: *'if a young person was being groomed by older men who were always hanging around, getting her involved in substance misuse and sexual activity, keeping her out at night, parents would be demonstrating some pretty assertive behaviour. But that doesn't seem to happen in care homes. It seems that it is just accepted that it's a place where young people will be targeted by abusers.'* (V- J3) There were also serious concerns expressed about the reluctance to use physical restraints when verbal persuasion fails to prevent a young person from placing themselves in dangerous situations. Models of intensive support, including physical restraint where necessary, have been extensively researched by those involved with specialist therapeutic units working with highly damaged young people. There may be lessons to be learned from that research that could be applied more broadly to residential care settings

7.10 For some children and young people, a more intensive and targeted approach is required. Two areas expressed a frustration that some victims come from families that have been experiencing difficulties for years, generation after generation. It was considered that there needs to be a policy of intensive engagement with such families *'and a positive attitude about changing their circumstances.'* (P-G2)

7.11 All areas welcomed the availability of the new offences but some commented that legislation alone was not enough. The wider community needs to be more aware of the issues so that these can become 'living laws.' Areas almost unanimously felt that public education for communities enables everyone to better protect vulnerable young people, and ensures that potential perpetrators understand the law and expect it to be applied rigorously. This means that training and awareness must be targeted to potential abusers as well as to potential victims. Work carried out by organisations working with sex offenders and with violent and abusive adults can helpfully raise awareness of the harm caused by sexual exploitation.³⁹

³⁸ Sex Education Forum (2006)

³⁹ see the work of Stop It Now! (www.stopitnow.org.uk)

Conclusions

Why is it important to challenge the perpetrators of child sexual exploitation?

Perpetrators of sexual exploitation are guilty of child abuse and their activities should be given the same attention and urgency as any other child protection enquiry. A number of compelling factors emerged from the scoping exercise:

- perpetrators commit many crimes against their victims including **serious sexual and violent crimes**, and supplying them with drugs and alcohol
- perpetrators use **fear, intimidation, substance addiction** and **emotional abuse**, as well as serious violence, to sexually exploit children and young people
- the harms caused by perpetrators impact significantly on their victims and wider society through levels of **teenage pregnancy**, the **spread of STIs**, **mental health problems** and many other health issues
- perpetrators harm their victims so deeply that, without intensive support, recovery can be challenging. The **emotional and violent abuse** can be so intense that victims may go on to become perpetrators, or to become involved in prostitution
- if perpetrators are allowed to act without impunity the same fate will befall **generation after generation** of vulnerable young people.

Why is child sexual exploitation not being addressed systematically?

The findings from the scoping exercise suggest that it is still rare for child sexual exploitation to be cited as an LSCB priority, and even more so for it to have been mainstreamed by local agencies. Local partnerships continue to struggle with child sexual exploitation as an issue for a number of reasons:

- **the concept of child sexual exploitation is still seen as a new one for many agencies** A new issue is a new burden if resources are already stretched. Tackling this new burden does not generally contribute to the achievement of local targets so it is rarely accorded a high priority
- **it is largely hidden from services** It requires a significant level of proactivity to develop an understanding of how and where exploitation is taking place in each area. An issue will not become a priority without evidence that it is a significant problem locally. The irony is that this will never be known unless local partnerships are prepared to put some resources towards investigating the problem. While LSCBs do not record data of cases of sexual exploitation, its prevalence will remain unknown
- **it is largely hidden from local communities** As such it is not an issue that causes residents to complain. This is another reason why it fails to be accorded a high priority
- **it requires different skills and a new approach** Victims make reluctant witnesses and are difficult to help by virtue of the hold that the perpetrators of sexual exploitation will have over them. Investigations are slow, intensive and require a multi-agency approach. Police officers find that they need to develop relationships of trust more readily associated with social care, and

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children's service professionals find themselves involved in the investigative process. For many local practitioners this requires something of an uncomfortable shift from traditional roles.

Challenges for LSCBs to consider

All areas were asked about the barriers and challenges they faced and what needed to be done to overcome them. This has provided an insight into how a plan of action might be developed to ensure that the sexual exploitation of children and young people becomes a priority for every area:

A multi-agency approach

- **Ensuring that child sexual exploitation is included as a child protection issue by children's services and Public Protection Units** Separate but parallel arrangements may be considered necessary to address child sexual exploitation but the objective must be to offer no less a response than would be offered to victims of any other form of child abuse
- **Ensuring that local protocols support an effective multi-agency approach to child sexual exploitation incorporating prevention, early intervention, support for victims and their parents/carers and ensuring justice** It is understood that the statutory SCIP guidance is to be revised to incorporate all aspects of child sexual exploitation. This provides an opportunity for local agencies to re-visit their protocols to ensure that they support a framework for a proactive and coordinated response to all models of child sexual exploitation
- **Establishing a focal point for referrals and the coordination of a multi-agency approach** This can be achieved through the establishment of a dedicated unit or team, or through the appointment of a local coordinator whose role would comprise awareness raising as well as acting as a central point for expressions of concern, the gathering of information and ensuring that referrals are acted upon to safeguard children and young people and investigate perpetrators
- **Identifying points of contact in each agency** Named points of contact in the police, children's services, health and education (and other key agencies) strongly supports effective partnership working
- **Ensuring the allocation of resources to support a needs-led response to child sexual exploitation** The response should be based on a broad definition of child sexual exploitation, a commitment to early intervention at the 'at risk' stage and the provision of a child protection response to those swapping or selling sex
- **Making links with CDRPs and other local partnerships to align work on child sexual exploitation with other strategies** As well as links with runaways/missing strategies (see below) this should include the coordinated prostitution strategy and the broader work of Every Child Matters (ECM). Addressing sexual exploitation is key to achieving the ECM outcome of 'staying safe' – but every one of the ECM outcomes could be seriously affected if a child or young person becomes a victim of sexual exploitation
- **The development of a monitoring system** This could include numbers of victims identified, perpetrators charged and convicted, and could also cover early interventions (and progress against the Early Child Matters outcomes), progress on missing person reports and disruptions

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The foundation for effective evidence gathering

- **Ensuring that single agency policies and LSCB protocols support a proactive and intelligence-led approach to policing** Police and partners need to work together on pro formas for the gathering of information in an evidentially sound way, and the use of shared databases for preserving 'soft' information, in order to build a case for the prosecution of offenders
- **Ensuring that work on missing young people and sexual exploitation is linked** Given the vulnerability of missing young people to sexual exploitation, linking the two areas of work identifies those at risk at an early stage
- **Identifying ways to monitor individuals believed to be exploiting children or young people** This can be achieved through the MAPPA process
- **Identifying and supporting dedicated services to provide key worker support for victims of child sexual exploitation** This should be a service capable of delivering an assertive therapeutic outreach model
- **Ensuring that there is support available that meets the needs of all ages up to, and beyond, age 18** This should be part of the leaving care plan for looked after young people
- **Ensuring that those providing support manage the relationship with the young victim throughout an investigation** A child-centred approach is crucial. It also needs to be recognised that the provision of support is the route through which any information about the offence is likely to be imparted

Developing a disruption plan

- **Ensuring that protocols include the requirement to develop a disruption plan as part of the response to child sexual exploitation** A disruption plan needs to be seen as a crucial element of the investigation process
- **Developing relationships with other agencies to deliver the disruption plan** Raising awareness with other law enforcement agencies eg licensing inspectors can strengthen the ability to disrupt perpetrators

Preparing a prosecution case

- **Ensuring that local protocols include agreements with the CPS for an early case discussion** The CPS can provide invaluable advice on case preparation
- **Developing creative investigative techniques** This will reduce the burden on young witnesses
- **Ensuring early consideration of any special measures, or support, needed by a young witness** This will ensure that best evidence is given in court.

Awareness raising, training and guidance

- **Encouraging schools, Pupil Referral Units and other organisations providing education to young people to incorporate sexual exploitation in the delivery of the PSHE curriculum** This should follow the guidance in the Sex Education Forum

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factsheet, with delivery and support commissioned from local dedicated services where available

- **Commissioning awareness raising sessions for all agencies in contact with young people** Where specialist services are available they are usually best placed to provide this, usually on a multi-agency basis or tailored to the needs of specific agencies
- **Commissioning specialist training for those involved in child sexual exploitation work** This will help to develop a cadre of specialists

Issues for national consideration

Most of those interviewed for the scoping exercise were keen to make progress and some had already begun to do so. There are some established dedicated teams and units, as well as some highly stretched but effective individual officers working on the prosecution of child sexual exploitation offenders. Although most areas describe themselves as 'getting there' rather than on top of the issue, there is much to be learned from them in terms of establishing an effective framework for investigating child sexual exploitation. The future development of guidance or training should take full account of their developing expertise.

Nevertheless it should not be overlooked that many areas remain at a very early stage of development. Awareness raising about the nature of child sexual exploitation is still needed by key agencies and partnerships as well as by universal service providers and the wider community. The first challenge for national agencies and central government is to consider how they might add value to the work of LSCBs to take this work forward, including the development of guidance, training packages and other practical support. For example:

- **SCIP guidance** The publication of the updated guidance on *Safeguarding Children Involved in Prostitution* in an expanded version to cover all forms of child sexual exploitation is eagerly awaited. As part of the delivery of the coordinated prostitution strategy, the government gave a commitment to revise the SCIP guidance to reflect the organisational changes and other developments in policy and practice that have taken place since 2000. This commitment was reiterated in *Staying Safe*⁴⁰
- **guidance on effective investigative techniques** There is already guidance on investigating child abuse⁴¹ but many areas commented that they would welcome the provision of advice and guidance on effective intervention techniques, disruption tactics and investigation methods specifically in relation to child sexual exploitation. Nationally developed guidance would avoid the duplication of effort taking place across the country and provide LSCBs with the confidence to 'lift the stone' on this issue. A commitment to provide such guidance was given in the coordinated prostitution strategy
- **guidance for residential carers** Specific guidance, based on research in therapeutic settings, would help to increase awareness of child sexual exploitation among residential care home staff, and could support the development of protocols between care homes and the police to address the targeting of those settings by perpetrators

⁴⁰ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008)

⁴¹ Association of Chief Police Officers (2005)

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- **guidance on supporting young witnesses** *Staying Safe* included a commitment to publish a toolkit on how to set up local support schemes for young witnesses based on good practice from existing schemes. The toolkit could include specific consideration of the support required for this group of victims. Further consideration could also be given to ways in which the court experience can be improved to ensure justice, for example through the use of trained prosecutors and barristers, and specialist courts
- **the development of training programmes** While some areas benefitted from training provided by CEOP, Barnardos and local dedicated services, a more systematic approach is needed to ensure that every area has access to awareness raising programmes, to advice on how to develop a local strategy to tackle child sexual exploitation, and on investigative techniques in order to disrupt and prosecute offenders. A nationally devised programme would ensure minimum standards and support the development of professional accreditation
- **the development of a national network of CSE coordinators and other specialist staff** A number of areas are working towards the identification of central points of contact and appointing child sexual exploitation coordinators. Further practical support could usefully include the development of a national network to support specialist staff. The NWG is developing this role through its network and could be supported to facilitate the sharing of good practice, particularly through the period when expertise is being developed
- **the development of offender profiles** Many areas are looking to develop databases to preserve information related to sexual exploitation. While this will help to provide them with a clearer picture of models and prevalence in their own locality, many were also keen to have information on the national picture. There was a lack of clarity about the role of national agencies, including the UKHTC and CEOP. It would be timely to consider how both agencies might best support and add value to local activity. This could include the central collation of data to develop victim and offender profiles, and a national picture of the extent and models of child sexual exploitation.

A national priority

Many areas felt that the role of government was to ensure that child sexual exploitation is kept high on the agenda. It was considered that this would help to justify increased priority and help to improve the allocation of resources locally. However the real barrier was considered to be currently conflicting targets. It was widely considered that agency targets need to be aligned more effectively to support a safeguarding approach. There are a number of opportunities for progress in this area:

- following the recommendations of the 2005 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary's report, *Keeping Safe, Staying Safe*, **a new set of strategic and key performance indicators on child abuse cases** is being developed by the Home Office, ACPO and HMIC to be included in the new Assessments of Policing and Community Safety framework planned for introduction this year. This is intended to be in place by 2010 to give prominence to child abuse investigation, ensuring it receives adequate resourcing and improving performance. Child abuse investigation should always explicitly include the investigation of child sexual exploitation

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- the government is committed to publishing **an action plan on runaways** in June 2008 to implement the principles set out in the Children's Society report, *Stepping Up*, and **revised Missing from Home and Care guidance**, to include specific references to services for particularly vulnerable groups such as children from abroad who may be trafficked. The government has already included **a new indicator on the number of young people who run away from home or care** in the National Indicator Set for local government (to be measured from 2009-2010) to ensure the effectiveness of work to help young runaways is monitored at national level. Missing person return interviews are a crucial tool for early intervention to establish the causes of the missing episode and to prevent child sexual exploitation and other criminality which arises from the vulnerability of missing children and young people. This requires a specific target
- the *Staying Safe Action Plan*⁴² notes the need to **implement the prostitution strategy** and the **cross-government sexual violence and abuse action plan**. The focus on prevention of sexual exploitation within this work needs to be prioritised.
- the government's Tackling Violence Action Plan⁴³ includes priorities for action in two key areas: enabling local agencies to work together better, and improving the care provided to victims, both to reduce harm and to help secure more convictions. **For sexual offences the overall focus is specifically on improving the record of bringing offenders to justice**. The Action Plan explicitly supports the part of the prostitution strategy that focuses on the prosecution of the perpetrators of sexual exploitation against children and young people and will be a vital tool for local partnerships in terms of prioritising action and developing new initiatives focussed on securing more convictions
- a number of the government's **new Public Service Agreements**⁴⁴ are relevant to the investigation and prosecution of the sexual exploitation of children and young people, including:
 - **PSA 13 Improve young people and children's safety**
 - **PSA 23 Make communities safer**
 - **PSA 24 Deliver a more effective, transparent and responsive criminal justice system for victims and the public**

These agreements apply to the government as a whole and therefore to all statutory agencies.

The case for a national strategy

The findings from the scoping exercise have clear implications for the delivery of a number of government initiatives, including those outlined above. Evidence of different successful models has emerged from the exercise. But it is clear that further work, including the development of guidance on investigative techniques and the systematic provision of training, is needed. This should be part of a national strategy to ensure that all LSCBs develop a model tailored to local need that incorporates

⁴² Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008)

⁴³ Home Office (2008)

⁴⁴ The PSAs came into effect on 1st April 2008

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identification, engagement, disruption and prosecution to effectively challenge the perpetrators of exploitation against children and young people. Without a specific focus on sexual exploitation the commitments and requirements in the initiatives outlined above can be missed. It is difficult for LSCBs to find the funding for everything that they are required to deliver and, without a national lead, agencies will continue to struggle to make child sexual exploitation a priority. In 2001 the government produced a *National Plan for Safeguarding Children from Commercial Sexual Exploitation*. This stated that '*the national plan will be reviewed annually and updated regularly.*'⁴⁵ It also noted that the '*meaningful participation of children and young people within the planning and consultation process*' should be facilitated.⁴⁶ Neither of these actions has been followed up. A national plan that draws together the different strands of work with sexually exploited and missing young people is long overdue and should be advanced under a commissioner for missing and exploited children and young people.

⁴⁵ Department of Health et al (2001), p 34, 7.15

⁴⁶ Department of Health et al (2001), p 34, 7.17

Appendix A Relevant legislation

These offences are likely to be the most applicable to cases of child sexual exploitation. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 in particular contains a range of appropriate offences.

Sexual Offences Act 2003	Max penalty
s 1, rape	Life imprisonment
s 5, rape of a child under 13	Life imprisonment
s 6, assault of a child under 13 (by penetration)	Life imprisonment
s 7, sexual assault of a child under 13 (touching)	14 years
s 8, causing or inciting a child to engage in sexual activity	Life imprisonment (penetration) 14 years (no penetration)
s 9, sexual activity with a child under 16	14 years
s 16, sexual activity with a child under 18	5 years
s 11, engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child under 16	10 years
s 18, engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a child under 18	5 years
s 12, causing a child under 16 to watch a sexual act	14 years
s 19, causing a child under 18 to watch a sexual act	5 years
s 14, arranging or facilitating a child sex offence (child under 16)	10 years
s 15, meeting a child following sexual grooming (child under 16)	10 years
s 47, paying for the sexual services of a child child under 13 involving penetration) child under 13, not involving penetration child aged 16-17	Life imprisonment 14 years 7 years
s 48, causing or inciting child prostitution or pornography	14 years
s 49, Controlling a child prostitute or a child involved in pornography	14 years
s 50, arranging or facilitating child prostitution or pornography	14 years
s 57, 58, 59, trafficking into, within and out of the UK for sexual exploitation	14 years
s 61, administering a substance with intent	10 years

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Other legislation

Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

s 4, supply (and offer to supply) a controlled drug to another

Class A

Life imprisonment

Class B or C

14 years

Protection of Children Act 1978

s 1, taking/making/distribution or possessing with intent to distribute indecent photographs of children

14 years

Criminal Justice Act 1988

s 160, possession of indecent photographs of children

5 years

Child Abduction Act 1984

s 2, abduction of a child by another person

7 years

Intoxicating Substances (Supply) Act 1985

s 1, supply of intoxicating substances to a person under 18

6 months

Proceeds of Crime Act 2002

s 327 – 329, – money laundering offences

14 years

Civil orders

Sexual Offences Act 2003

s 104, Sexual Offences Prevention Orders

s 114, Foreign Travel Orders

s 123, Risk of Sexual Harm Orders

Police Powers

Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006

s 58, power of entry and search of relevant offender's home address

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Appendix B Initial questionnaire

1. (a) Do you have examples of good practice in your local area on evidence gathering in cases involving offences relating to the sexual exploitation of children and young people (under 18s)?

Yes, in the past 5 years	
Yes, in the past 2 years	
No	

- (b) Do you have examples of good practice in your local area on evidence of where evidence has been passed to the CPS to try to prosecute alleged abusers?

Yes, in the past 5 years	
Yes, in the past 2 years	
No	

- (c) Do you have examples of good practice in your local area of evidence of how local agencies work together to provide a multi-agency response to achieve (a) or (b) above?

Yes	
No	

2. Investigations and prosecutions against those who sexually exploit children and young people generally involve that young person acting as a witness. Do you have experience of supporting a child or young person through this process, and could you describe how their needs were met and by whom?

Yes	
No	

3. Is your practice guided by any particular policy or local protocol advising on:
a) gathering evidence against potential abusers?

Yes	
No	

- b) taking a case to CPS for prosecution for sexual exploitation or other legislation that can be used against those who sexually exploit children and young people?

Yes	
No	

- c) supporting a child or young person who might act as a witness within the case proceedings?

Yes	
No	

4. In your locality are there any particular barriers or challenges which are hindering or preventing you from achieving any of the issues outlined in the previous questions? Could you describe these to us in a follow up interview?

Yes	
No	

Appendix C

Analysis of key themes emerging from the interview responses

<p>A multi-agency approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dedicated multi-agency unit working with range of agencies in 3 areas• Partnership approach based around a coordinator, or team that fulfils that role, in 9 areas• No specific arrangements but planned in 4 areas• No specific arrangements planned in 4 areas <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific protocol and procedures, including a broad definition, in 8 areas• Specific protocol based on the SCIP guidance in 4 areas• No specific protocol/procedures but planned in 2 areas• No specific protocol/procedures planned in 5 areas <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resources often insufficient to support a proactive approach• Resources should be allocated in a way that supported the prosecution of offenders• Many critical that work is allocated to a single CP officer or not treated as CP at all• Widely considered that it should be core business for the police – and that level of commitment would probably require performance indicators and targets• Capacity also perceived as a challenge <p>Barriers/challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All 20 areas considered a lack of resources to be a barrier to challenging offenders• Four felt that the instability of resources for the voluntary sector was a major barrier – and this could be overcome if child sexual exploitation was properly recognised as child protection and mainstreamed• Thirteen areas considered that a lack of relevant targets for the police was a key barrier• Four areas commented on the challenges for rural areas/areas with low density population. Difficult to justify dedicated arrangements and specialist workers; low turnover of staff impedes new ways of working; and poor infrastructure impedes delivery of support and other services
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Gathering evidence of the sexual exploitation of children and young people

<p style="color: red;">The foundation for effective evidence gathering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key challenge to building a case was seen to be the effective recording and preservation of information and intelligence • Effective information sharing in 9 areas • Significant concerns raised about willingness of agencies to share information in 7 areas • Too little activity to assess level of information sharing in 4 areas • Most areas expressed concern about the level of information sharing between the police and social care agencies • Also concerns about lack of engagement from other agencies, inc health and education • A centralised database was considered to be helpful to look at child sexual exploitation more widely <p>Barriers/challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight areas considered information sharing to be a challenge
<p style="color: red;">Developing a disruption plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruptive tactics used in 13 areas • No activity, or no systematic approach in 7 areas • Disruptive tactics included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use of Child Abduction Act (10 areas) - use of licensing laws (6 areas) - evictions (4 areas) - SOPOs (4 areas) - prosecuting other offences (3 areas) - ASBOs (2 areas) - working with immigration (1 area) - use of RSHOs (1 area) <p>Barriers/challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three areas felt that care home staff required clearer guidance on how to respond to sexual exploitation – including guidance on when physical restraints can be used • Three areas were concerned about the lack of availability of a therapeutic response, including poor accessibility to CAMHS • And identified work with families involved in sexual exploitation for a number of generations as a real challenge
<p style="color: red;">Preparing a prosecution case</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive approach based on support for the child in 7 areas • Reactive approach to policing in 4 areas • No cases/no experience in 9 areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support provided by a dedicated project in 7 areas • Support provided on an ad hoc basis, no protocol in 5 areas

Gathering evidence of the sexual exploitation of children and young people

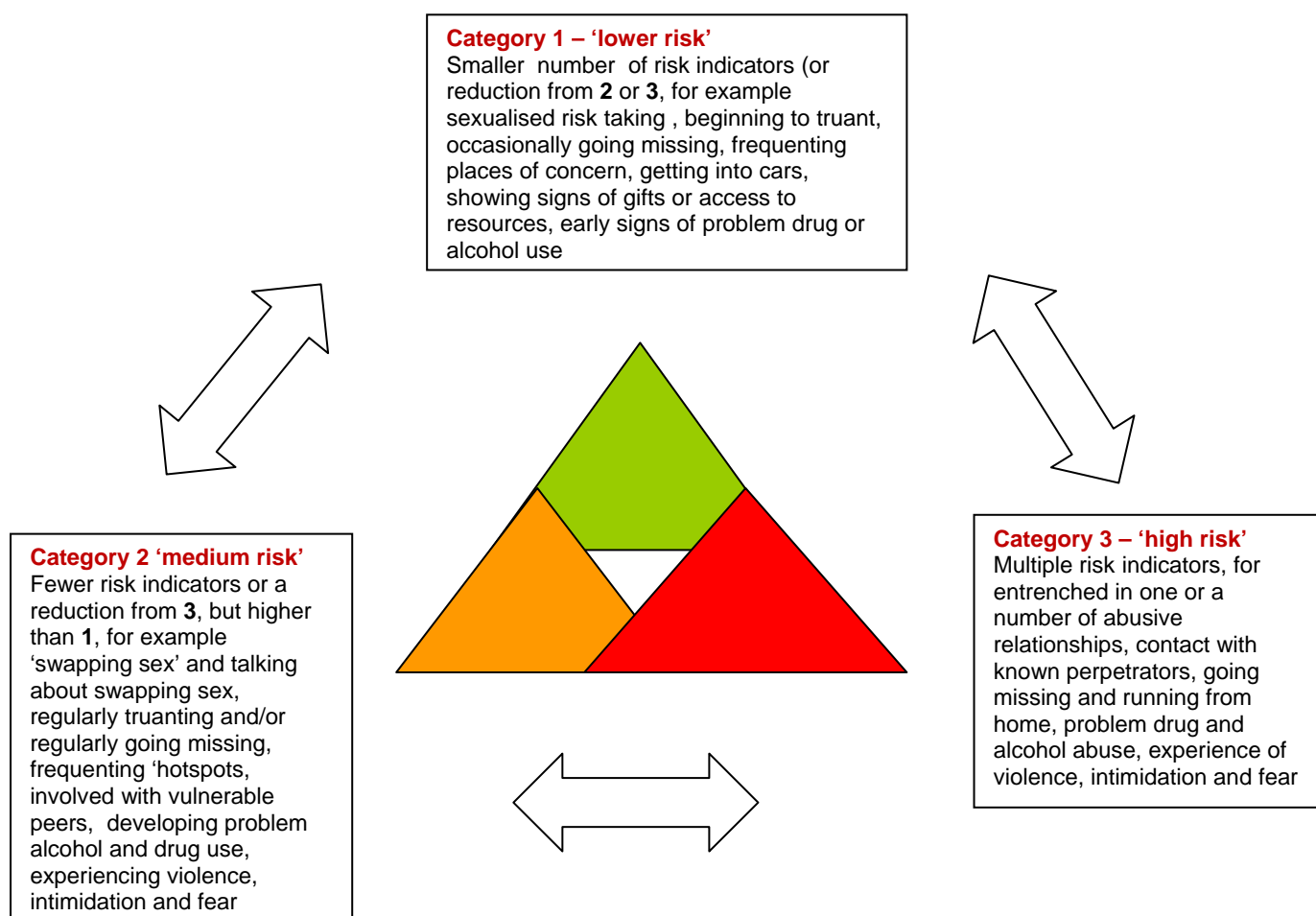
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No protocol and no experience in 8 areas <p>Barriers/challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four areas were concerned about the lack of implementation of the CPS protocol for young witnesses • And called for new arrangements – such as specialist courts – to support victimless prosecutions
<p>Awareness raising, training and guidance (13)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A challenge to change professionals' mindsets especially in areas where there has been no agency response to this issue for many years • Awareness raising considered crucial for young people through schools and their parents • Awareness raising also important with the wider public (potential jurors). Need to ensure that the consent issue is understood and young people recognised as victims of crime rather than perceived as a nuisance/beyond help • Need to ensure all aspects of child sexual exploitation recognised as child abuse – feared that current focus on trafficking may lead to a fragmented approach • More resources needed for training including training aimed at senior managers who control the allocation of resources <p>Barriers/challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thirteen areas saw the need for awareness raising as a key challenge • Six areas considered cited the delay with the publication of the updated SCIP guidance, and a lack of other material, to be a barrier • Six areas also considered it would be useful for there to be a centre of excellence, a national lead for the development of an investigation strategy, and a national coordinator network to share information

Appendix D

Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Cycle

This model⁴⁷ provides an indication of the intervention and support required for a child or young person following an assessment of the degree or level of sexual exploitation they are experiencing. The assessment needs to be made on the basis of known risk indicators or 'signals' – immediate vulnerability factors – as well as any history of disadvantage or background of vulnerability factors.

The overlapping of the triangles reflects the fact that risk indicators may be shared between the different categories. The arrows indicate that children and young people move from one category to another. In a limited number of cases this may even include moving directly from high to low risk where interventions, including the prosecution of offenders, have been particularly effective. The movement between categories creates a Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Cycle:



⁴⁷ Developed by the National Working Group for Sexually Exploited Children and Young People

Appendix E Training resources

For professionals working with sexually exploited children and young people

- CEOP provides a series of specialised training courses aimed at those who conduct criminal investigations involving the sexual abuse of children, and those with responsibilities for the safeguarding of children from sexual predators
- The CEOP Academy offers an academic qualification for specialists involved with child sex offenders and child abuse. This provides continuous development for professionals working in the child protection environment. Police, including child protection officers and investigators, can work towards a PG Certificate on Forensic Behavioural Analysis, accredited through the University of Central Lancashire.⁴⁸
- ECPAT UK provides training on safeguarding child victims of trafficking, including introductory, advanced and training for trainers⁴⁹
- In many areas multi-agency training is commissioned by LSCBs from local dedicated projects, including those run by Barnardo's,⁵⁰ to raise awareness and provide information on risk factors and indicators
- In some areas local projects also provide tailored training on request for particular groups, for example residential social workers and sexual health workers
- CROP provides a 2 hour component for multi-agency training on the relationship between professionals and families⁵¹
- NSPCC trafficking helpline provides a consultation service to help local partnerships to set up a service to respond to child trafficking
- UKHTC provides awareness raising presentations for the police and local partnerships on internal trafficking involving children and young people⁵²
- The National Working Group arranges meetings and practitioner-led training events at which common concerns can be shared and discussed⁵³

For young people, their parents and carers

- CEOP has developed the ThinkuKnow educational programme⁵⁴ for children, young people and their parents
- Barnardos and other specialist projects provide preventative and awareness raising programmes for schools, Pupil Referral Units and other settings. Barnardo's has recently developed the B-Wise pack. Details of other resources are included in the Sex Education Forum guidance for PSHE coordinators⁵⁵
- CROP provides information, including leaflets and publications, for parents

⁴⁸ details of CEOP training can be found at <http://www.ceop.gov.uk/training/training-courses.asp>

⁴⁹ contact: training@ecpat.org.uk

⁵⁰ www.barnardos.co.uk

⁵¹ www.crop1.co.uk

⁵² contact: Amanda. Palmer@ukhtc.pnn.police.uk

⁵³ www.nationalworkinggroup.co.uk

⁵⁴ Thinkuknow.co.uk

⁵⁵ NCB/Sex Education Forum (2006)

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