



## HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 25TH JUNE 2013

**SUBJECT: RAISING AWARENESS OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION – THISTLE  
DVD AND ACCOMPANYING PACK**

**REPORT BY: ACTING CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES**

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To raise members awareness of a new resource for children and young people developed by the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB's) in South East Wales.

### **2. SUMMARY**

2.1 Following a high profile case of Child Sexual Exploitation in Ebbw Vale three years ago, Gwent Police used the Proceeds of Crime Act to secure money from the perpetrator of these crimes.

2.2 The Police contacted the LSCB's in South East Wales and asked them if they would develop a resource for children and young people that would raise their awareness of sexual exploitation and the associated risks.

2.3 The LSCB's commissioned this work from Ebbw Vale youth project.

2.4 The DVD called 'Thistle' (the name of the Police Operation in Ebbw Vale) was published in December 2012 and is in the process of being disseminated to all schools and youth groups in the region.

2.5 This paper accompanies the Thistle DVD and pack.

### **3. LINKS TO STRATEGY**

3.1 Children Act 2004.

3.2 Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004 (2006).

### **4. THE REPORT**

4.1 Child Sexual Exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse and involves young people (girls and boys) being groomed, sometimes abducted, paid (with money, gifts or even with a 'relationship') and subsequently sold to other adults for sex.

4.2 Operation Thistle was a high profile case of child sexual exploitation that took place in Ebbw Vale three years ago. This involved the lead perpetrator and other adults sexually exploiting up to 100 young women.

- 4.3 The lead perpetrator ran a legitimate photography business that he used to attract and groom young women and their families. He then used drugs and threats to coerce and force them to have sex with adult males, trafficking them to other parts of the country for this purpose.
- 4.4 Following the conviction, Gwent Police felt strongly that young people needed more information about this issue and the behaviour of perpetrators and how to spot it. They used the Proceeds of Crime Act to secure some money from the lead perpetrator's assets and gave this to the LSCB's in South East Wales, asking them to produce some kind of resource for young people.
- 4.5 The young people of the EVAD group based in Ebbw Vale, were given an outline of the case in Ebbw Vale and a few other high profile cases in other parts of Britain and some key messages that the LSCB's wanted to convey. The young people wrote the script, directed, produced and acted in the DVD.
- 4.6 The DVD and accompanying materials was designed to be used with children and young people as part of a Personal and Social Education (PSE) lesson in school or as part of an awareness raising programme in Youth clubs.
- 4.7 The DVD is not graphic, but does highlight the behaviours of perpetrators and the reality of how young people can be ensnared and trapped in sexual exploitation.
- 4.8 The key message of the DVD is that if you see something you are concerned about, tell someone like the Police. It was actually a mother being concerned about the photographs being taken of her daughter (not indecent but she felt uncomfortable about her being dressed up to look so much older than 14) that gave the Police the indication they needed to dig deeper into the life of the lead perpetrator and this subsequently led to his conviction.
- 4.9 The pack was published in December 2012 and is in the process of being distributed to all schools and youth groups in the region.
- 4.10 Since then the pack has been used successfully to raise awareness of this issue with professionals, foster carers and parents. We have concluded that it has wider appeal than we originally anticipated and intend to use it throughout the region to raise awareness of this issue with all age groups in communities.
- 4.11 There has been considerable interest from other parts of Britain in this product and it has been featured as good practice in a few national conferences.
- 4.12 We are also holding sessions for those who will be delivering the sessions so that they can feel confident they have the knowledge and skill to manage this issue appropriately and effectively.
- 4.13 Sexual exploitation is a growing problem. It happens everywhere, not just in towns and involves boys as well as girls. Looked After children are particularly vulnerable to this form of abuse.
- 4.14 High profile cases in Rochdale and other places, demonstrate that we are only really seeing the tip of the iceberg currently. It is important that everyone knows (professionals, parents/carers, children and young people, members of the public) that this issue exists, how they might identify concerns and what to do when they have them. This is the only way we will be able to prevent this happening and protect children and young people.
- 4.15 Whilst the LSCB's do not currently have the funds to develop a Welsh speaking version of the DVD and materials, we are planning to complete this in the future when money becomes available.
- 4.16 We are targeting youth groups as well as schools in order to reach young people who don't attend school or attend alternative curriculum projects.

- 4.17 Looked After children and young people will be shown the DVD by their social worker and all foster carers working for the Local Authority will also be given a session on this issue so that they can identify any concerns at an early point.
- 4.18 The pack has been distributed throughout the region so that all children and young people will have access to this learning opportunity.
- 4.19 The materials could be adapted for use with children with disabilities.
- 4.20 The report reflects the content of the DVD and accompanying materials and the action plan of the regional Case Review and Practice Development group that sits within the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board structure and has responsibility for delivering this initiative.

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report is for information purposes, so the Council's Equalities Impact Assessment does not need to be applied.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 None.

## **7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The delivery of the DVD and materials will be achieved through existing staffing resources

## **8. CONSULTATIONS**

- 8.1 The views of those consulted have been incorporated into the report.

## **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That the HSCWB Scrutiny Committee note the contents of the report and DVD and raise awareness of this resource within the community.

## **10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 10.1 To ensure that members of the Health Social Care and Well-being Scrutiny Committee are aware of this initiative.

## **11. STATUTORY POWER**

- 11.1 Children Act 2004.

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Consultees: Social Services Senior Management Team  
Cllr Robin Woodyatt, Cabinet Member, Social Services  
Children's Services Divisional Management Team  
Lin Slater, Chair of the Case Review and Practice Development Group  
Corporate Parenting Group