Introduction

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of abuse. It involves children and young people being forced or manipulated into sexual activity in exchange for something; this can be anything from money, gifts or accommodation or less tangible goods such as affection or status. The sexual activity and exchange may appear to be consensual but this is based on an imbalance of power which severely limits the victims’ options and choice. CSE is a particular type of abuse with particular characteristics which defy the same approaches used to address child abuse for younger children.

This strategy sets out the ambition and commitment of the Wigan Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) to take all actions possible in the identification and disruption of CSE and to protect and support those children at risk of or who have been subjected to this abuse across the borough.

The strategy is divided into 4 interlinking overarching objectives: Prevent, Protect, Pursue and Prosecute. By making measurable progress against each of these objectives, WSCB will achieve a fifth objective: Public Confidence. Reducing the incidence of child sexual exploitation relies heavily on community awareness and understanding of the problem, and that increased awareness and participation in the strategy is a key outcome measure that WSCB is working to.

Since the publication of our last CSE Strategy in 2012, we have made significant progress in this area and we have the evidence to support this, we are also a national leader in innovation through the Department for Education funded CSE Innovation Project, jointly delivered by Wigan and Rochdale.

This new strategy builds on this learning and research to ensure an effective multi agency response to an evolving issue.

Each part of this strategy recognises the need to work together across partner organisations and with our communities as we know that there is no single way to effectively address CSE. Whilst social workers have a key role to play in working with vulnerable young people, addressing CSE requires a multi-faceted approach involving a range of agencies such as health, police, education as well as the wider community, voluntary organisations and local businesses.
1. **Local and Regional Context**

Wigan’s CSE profile shows that the predominant risk is around online grooming and whilst there are a number of cases of face to face CSE, there are no predominant geographic hotspots.

As at the end of March 2016, the team had 121 children with open episodes. There has been some minor fluctuation in RAG scores across the quarter but information at the end of March shows that 38% were classed as medium risk, a reduction from 50% in January and 6% were classed as high risk, this has remained static over the quarter.

45% of all children open to the team at the end of March were CIN, 4% CP and 12% LAC. 35% had no current or previous involvement (21% had previously been CIN, CP or LAC and 14% had no previous involvement.)

5% of children were in the care of another local authority but being homed in Wigan. As at the end of March this figure was 6 children.

**Greater Manchester**

At any one given time there is an average of 234 cases open to Children’s Services in Greater Manchester where a child or young person has been assessed by their individual local authorities as being either medium or high risk of CSE using a common set of criteria agreed through Project Phoenix. A worryingly high number of these cases will result in young people being placed in a residential care. Current placement arrangements in Greater Manchester include 105 cases in which CSE was a factor with a total cost of £8.9m.

Greater Manchester devolution has a number of workstreams looking at the reform of Children’s Services. CSE is a key part of these workstreams and Greater Manchester is currently working on a bid to DfE to roll out the Innovation work across the ten authorities.

**Progress made since the last strategy**

In Wigan, we have a dedicated sub group, co-chaired by the Chief Executive of the Local Authority and the Borough Commander of Greater Manchester Police.
These arrangements have allowed us to strengthen and improve our multi-agency response and ensure that we have a joined up approach across the continuum of risk.

A range of activity has taken place over the year in order to raise awareness including:

- Training has been delivered to all front line police officers across the division.
- Joint presentations with Social care have been conducted to elected members.
- The Wigan Safeguarding Children Board have undertaken training within education establishments and third sector employers, bespoke training has been delivered to 1250 taxi drivers and over 150 bar staff.
- Joint awareness initiatives have been undertaken to raise public awareness including awareness events outside Wigan Rugby Ground on match days.
- Zoe Lodrick victim awareness training has been delivered to front line staff working within Wigan Borough, including staff from Police, Health, Education and Social care.
- All dedicated CSE staff have attended a selection of CSE held conferences and training events.
- WSCB have held a CSE conference including live drama group and a voice of the victim case study.
- A new referral pathway has been developed by Social Care and shared with all partners.
- Multi Agency locality briefings have been held with nearly 500 plus staff attending.
- A series of Healthy relationship events have been held in schools.
- The team and the WSCB have taken part in two Project Phoenix Weeks of Action.

In addition to these key activities, Wigan was also successful in securing DfE funding from the National Innovation Programme to deliver a joint project with Rochdale, on behalf of GMCA. “Project Phoenix: Alternatives to high cost and secure accommodation for victims of Child Sexual Exploitation in Greater Manchester” secured just under £1m to run a project to find alternatives to high cost and secure accommodation for victims of or at risk of CSE in Greater Manchester whilst radically improving outcomes for those young people and their families. The project is also about culture change, the way in which public services understand and respond to CSE, the nature of early intervention and prevention and the need to respond at scale.
The approach to the project has been threefold, firstly to undertake significant research, self assessment and engagement, to fill the gaps in our knowledge and to involve young people and families in how we can design new approaches to meet their needs. The second phase focused on testing a new service model in both Wigan and Rochdale to work intensively with 30 young people identified as medium risk. The final stage of the project is to develop options for a Greater Manchester upscale which will emerge out of research and practice; setting out options to take forward collaborative practice on CSE across the region.

The learning from the research and engagement phase underpins this strategy and sets out a clear set of principles for partners to follow when supporting young people and families. The learning to emerge from the newly established teams will be co-ordinated effectively across the partnership through the WSCB and will help to challenge the current system response to CSE by providing innovative and evidence based alternatives.
2. **Strategy Principles:**

The WSCB CSE Strategy 2016 – 2018 is underpinned by six key principles which have emerged from local experience, the engagement of young people and families and from national research.

1. **Young people must be at the centre**

The WSCB and partners will ensure that the voice of young people is listened to and respected and included within service design and evaluation wherever possible. At a practice level this will ensure that young people are involved within any decision made about them and that services are designed with young people in mind to reflect their specific needs, vulnerabilities and assets. We will ensure that practitioners do not label or define young people by their behaviour and that no blame is apportioned to them with a recognition that risky behaviour and choices made may be (mal)adaptation to previous harm.

2. **CSE is complex; therefore the response cannot be simple or linear**

We will ensure that assessment tools are evidence-informed and demonstrate an understanding of the multiple risk factors and vulnerabilities of young people and how they inter-relate. We understand the complexity of CSE and therefore service design and processes will reflect this and will not prescribe a one size fits all response for young people at risk. We will ensure that practitioners are appropriately trained across the partnership and supported to understand and work within the complex dynamics of CSE. We will also endeavor to recognise dual identities across the individual practice level and service level response, this may include instances where victims of CSE may also be identified as perpetrators and parents may be both a source of conflict and protection.

3. **No agency can address CSE in isolation; collaboration is essential**

The WSCB will ensure that safeguarding is promoted and accepted as being the responsibility of all those who come into contact with children and young people, ensuring that professional groups are clear on the unique contribution they make to the whole system. Strategic initiatives will draw on the expertise held by different agencies and all efforts made to align priorities and resources where it is possible to do so. Multi-agency
collaboration is enabled through this strategy which sets out our shared goals, shared language and shared values. We will ensure that universal services understand their role in providing preventative interventions and are equipped and supported to do so whilst schools and other community based settings are actively engaged in promoting young people’s understanding of health relationships. We will maintain specialist services which are fully resourced to provide targeted interventions for high-risk young people; we recognise that they are a source of knowledge and expertise to other services rather than operating separately or in isolation.

We will ensure that hierarchies between professional groups are recognised and managed by the WSCB to ensure that the strengths and contribution of each agency are facilitated. This will be underpinned by information sharing which we recognise as critical to success. We will review protocols at regular intervals and ensure feedback from practitioners regarding barriers to information sharing are used to improve process and strategy.

4. **Knowledge is crucial**

Through staff and partner training, the WSCB will oversee and ensure that all agencies understand conceptualisations of CSE and are familiar with local and national policy definitions, models and methods. This will also involve our children and young people having knowledge of CSE and being able to recognise the signs and to understand the nature of healthy relationships.

5. **Communities and families are valuable assets, and may also need support**

A vital asset in helping the Council and its partners to recognise and tackle CSE is the wider community and a key principle of this strategy is to support them to understand their role in protecting children and young people from harm. We know that communities are engaged in intelligence gathering and we will utilise this knowledge to inform “problem profiling”. In addition to this, we are committed to ensuring that clear information is available to our communities and partners so that they can recognise CSE at the earliest possible stage and act accordingly.

In addition to the wider community, families also play a key protective role in addressing CSE, services will ensure that this is recognised in the way that they are constructed as well
as at individual case level. We will continue in our commitment to support families and to engage them with the CSE support for their child, wherever possible and appropriate, to ensure that they are treated as key players in the team around the child. Where there are positive relationships between young people at risk of or experiencing CSE and their families, we will strive to ensure that these are promoted by the professionals working with them, wherever appropriate. This is aligned to the Deal for Children and Young People principles and will include all staff working with children, young people and families, undergoing training on the asset based approach.

6. **Effective services require resilient practitioners**

The emotional impact of CSE work on practitioners can be particularly demanding and this is recognised across the partnership with the appropriate support mechanisms in place. This commitment to the workforce includes ensuring that high quality supervision is in place to support practitioners to develop critical thinking skills, assessment skills and to promote their resilience. The management of the multi agency CSE Team will ensure that attention is paid to the impact of CSE work during case allocation and will support this process through robust staff recruitment and retention activity.

Members of the WSCB, as service leaders, are committed to proactively creating a culture where resilience is promotes across the workforce and this will be aligned to the workforce strategies within each organisation. The Board will also ensure, through its role in training and development, that high quality learning opportunities are provided for those working with CSE which go beyond formal training, this can include structured peer support; group supervision; and involvement in service development through co-design.
3. **Relationship to other Practice Guidance and Strategy**

The thread running throughout the strategy is for front line professionals and volunteers to have the acuity to identify and respond appropriately to children they feel are at risk of CSE, therefore this strategy should be read in conjunction with the Greater Manchester Safeguarding Partnership Procedures (online Link).

The WSCB CSE Strategy also aligns with WSCB’s training strategy which includes delivery of a comprehensive training programme appropriate for the wide range of professionals / volunteers.

The WSCB CSE Strategy also aligns with the WSCB commitment to partnership with Greater Manchester Project Phoenix, and also adopts the Project Phoenix Charter to Protecting Children (found here)

Further advice for practitioners is available from the CSE Multi Agency Team and Wigan Social Care Duty Team (01942 486172)
4. **Defining Child Sexual Exploitation:**

The Department for Education consulted on a definition for CSE which is intended to provide clarity so all professionals are using the same definition of child sexual exploitation in their work to prevent abuse and investigate offending. This revised definition was brought into effect on the 1st April 2016 and will be included within the statutory guidance, “Working Together to Safeguard Children.”

The definition is:

“Child sexual exploitation is a form of child abuse. It occurs where anyone under the age of 18 is persuaded, coerced or forced into sexual activity in exchange for, amongst other things, money, drugs/alcohol, gifts, affection or status. Consent is irrelevant, even where a child may believe they are voluntarily engaging in sexual activity with the person who is exploiting them. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact and may occur online.”