Report to:	Cabinet	Date of Meeting:	25 June 2020
Subject:	Safeguarding Children from Child Sexual and Criminal Exploitation and Children Reported as Missing		
Report of:	Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member - Children, Schools and Safeguarding		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

The report informs Members of the work agencies have undertaken to safeguard children from child sexual and criminal exploitation and children who have been reported as missing from home / care.

Recommendation(s):

that the work taking place in Sefton regarding Child Sexual and Criminal Exploitation and safeguarding children who have been reported as missing from home /care be noted.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):
To ensure Cabinet members are aware of the partnership activity undertaken to safeguard children from child sexual and criminal exploitation in Sefton and when they have been reported as missing, in respect of the statutory duties of every local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

Not Applicable

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A)   Revenue Costs

Not Applicable

(B)   Capital Costs

Not Applicable

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):   N/A.
Legal Implications: None
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable:
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Protecting children and young people from criminal & sexual exploitation remains a key priority, ensuring our most vulnerable children are safeguarded.
Commission, broker and provide core services: N/A
Place – leadership and influencer: N/A
Drivers of change and reform: N/A
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: N/A
Greater income for social investment: N/A
Cleaner Greener: N/A

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A)   Internal Consultations

The Executive Director Corporate Resources and Customer Services has been consulted and comments have been incorporated into the report. (FD 6030/20)
The Chief Legal and Democratic Officer has been consulted and comments have been incorporated into the report (LD 4215/20)

(B)   External Consultations

Not applicable

Implementation Date for the Decision

Not applicable for information only

Contact Officer:	Steven Martlew / Nicola Horne
Telephone Number:	07973988996 / 0151 934 4637
Email Address:	steven.martlew@sefton.gov.uk Nicolahorne@sefton.gov.uk

Appendices:
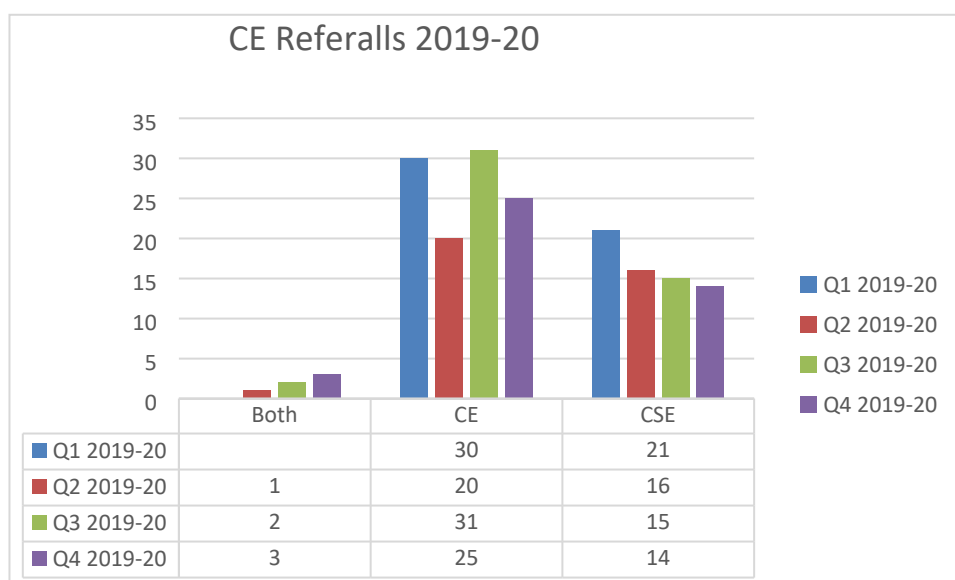
N/A

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1 Introduction

1.1 This report assures Members that Sefton Council and partnership agencies are effectively working together to safeguard children who are at risk of being sexually and / or criminally exploited, and children and young people who are reported as missing from home / care. The data included within this report is also reported on a quarterly basis to the Local Safeguarding Children Board Child Exploitation Sub Group. Sefton's Executive Director of Children's Social Care and Education is Chair of this Sub Group.

1.2 This report describes the response to Criminal and Sexual Exploitation and the response to children missing in Sefton over the last year. It will refer to the operation of the MACE (Multi Agency Child Exploitation) panel, and developments in term of how this is run locally and across Merseyside. It will reference audit findings and identify next steps, in response to work the partnership has completed recently with 'The Children's Society',' Research in Practice' and 'University of Bedfordshire' which will support our work going forward.

2. **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) & Child Criminal Exploitation (CE)**

Below is the detail of the number of referrals in this area across the reporting period

CE Referalls 2019-20

	Both	CE	CSE
Q1 2019-20		30	21
Q2 2019-20	1	20	16
Q3 2019-20	2	31	15
Q4 2019-20	3	25	14

The Child Exploitation sub group has noted and considered the trend over the year of criminal exploitation being much more of a factor of the referrals than the sexual exploitation. All agencies represented have been encouraged to use the data to assure themselves that staff are continuing to respond to Child Sexual Exploitation issues, particularly given the high-profile nature of attention on criminal exploitation, gang's and county lines.
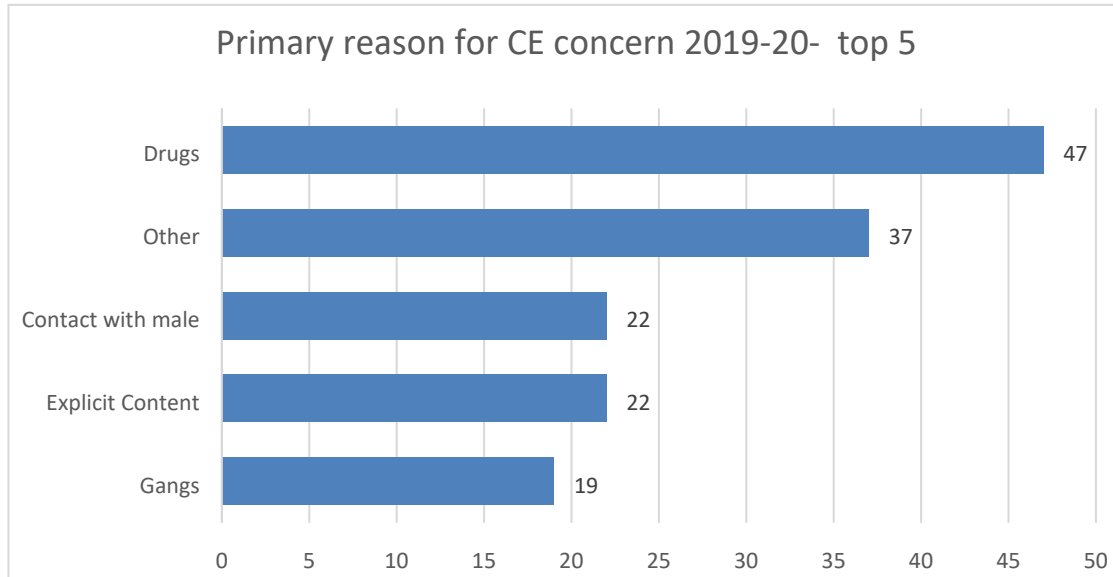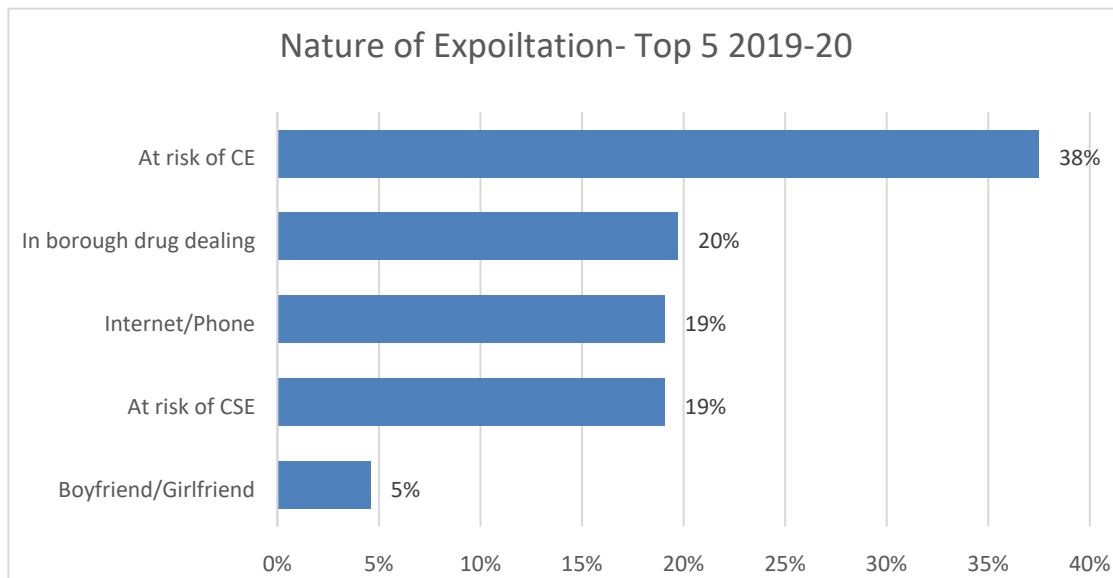
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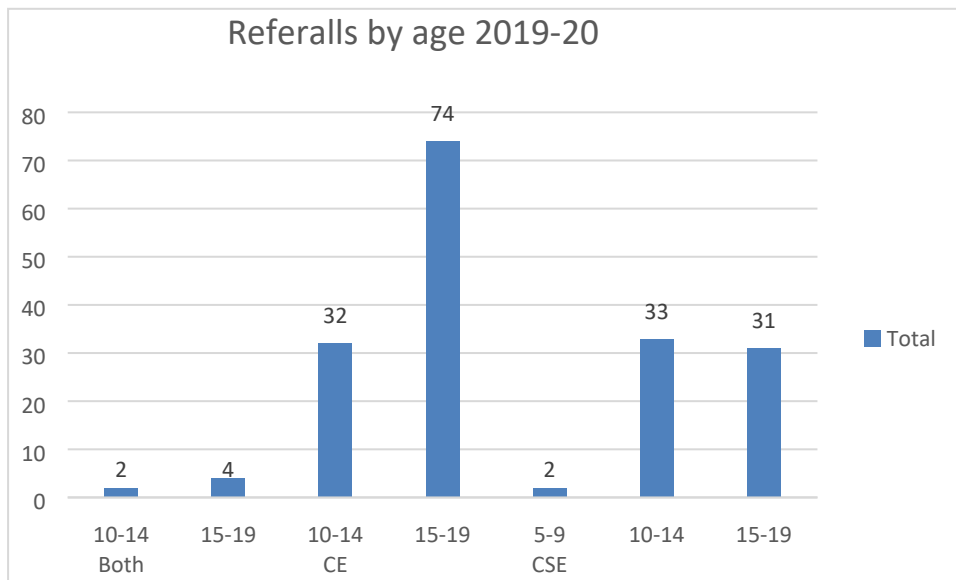
Of the 178 referrals received this year the age profile is not unexpected given risk-taking behaviour and vulnerability that is attributed to adolescence. Work was undertaken to understand the younger age group, this related to sharing of images by children and their use of new apps. The overview of the cases demonstrated that these children can quickly be offered work on Keeping Safe by the Early Help service who have become key contributors to the MACE panel this year to reduce the risks. Catch 22 (commissioned by the Merseyside Police Crime Commissioner) are involved in considering the cases at the Integrated Front Door on a daily basis.

The Criminal Exploitation sub group does look at sources of referrals, given that most referrals progressed are consistently (year on year) from the police and social care. The Criminal Exploitation sub group supports other agencies to identify signs/symptoms to ensure they are confident in making a referral and positively, this could indicate agencies not making referrals are accessing services for families without onward referral onto social care. We do know, for example, that health services have accessed training from Catch 22 this year.

2.2

Primary reason for CE concern 2019-20- top 5

Category	Value
Drugs	47
Other	37
Contact with male	22
Explicit Content	22
Gangs	19

This data shows the reasons for referral. The 'other' category is used to show the cohort of young people that come to the attention of agencies when CE/CSE concerns arise in the midst of other concerns in a family or when young people are identified through police operations which set out to explore the links between groups of young people and the adults in a given area.

Nature of Expoiltation- Top 5 2019-20

Category	Value
At risk of CE	38%
In borough drug dealing	20%
Internet/Phone	19%
At risk of CSE	19%
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	5%

2.3 MACE (Multi Agency Child Exploitation Panel) Developments

The MACE panel is chaired jointly by the Service Manager Safeguarding and Quality Assurance and the Detective Inspector from the Police and Vulnerable persons unit.

The purpose of MACE is to –

- Share information to increase the safety, health and wellbeing of children at risk of Criminal and/or sexual exploitation.
- Construct and implement a risk management plan that provides professional support to all those at risk and that reduces the risk of harm.

- Determine if threshold for MACE is met

The MACE panel considers, 'local policing intelligence' and members develop an understanding of the organised Crime Groups operating in Sefton. Frontline workers are invited to share information at the meeting or through the 'Tell us app' on Merseyside police website. There has been evidence of good partnership working to safeguard children across agencies, including early help, private children's homes staff and Youth Offending workers for example. The MACE will also collectively decide if any young person should be referred to the NRM (National Referral Mechanism) which exists to ensure that victims of modern slavery are appropriately identified and supported.

During the year the chairs have worked with colleagues across Merseyside and developed a new Child Exploitation assessment tool. Pan Mersey Strategic Mace agreed Sefton , Halton and Knowsley will pilot this. The Assessment tool has been produced with input from the input of the University of Bedfordshire and the Contextual Safeguarding programme, who are supporting system change in 5 areas of England and Wales (Knowsley being one of these authorities). This means that once fully implemented, Sefton will benefit from some external evaluation of the assessment tools used.

2.4 Project learning from the University of Bedfordshire, Research in Practice and The Children's Society

From January to March 2020 Sefton Council have been involved in a project that has supported the partners to look at data held in this area across the partnership in order to tell the story of exploitation better. The Child Exploitation sub group will take this work forward.

3. Children Reported as Missing

3.1 Children who are notified as missing are referred via the Multi – Agency Safeguarding Hub. Once they are located, Early Help workers in the Family Well Being Centres (FWBC)) complete the independent Return Interview (RI). The target time for the RI is 72 hours from the time the child is found.

3.2 The Return Interview should consider and identify :

- Early indicators of Child Exploitation
- Issues with a particular placement for a Looked After Child
- Issues within a family where further support is required

Our performance around timely completion of Return Interviews in 2019/20 has varied. In Q1 and Q2 performance was acceptable. However, Q3 performance dipped for both timeliness and numbers completed. Through observations, audits,

visits to neighbouring authorities and speaking to staff, areas for improvement were identified. As a result of this performance has improved since March 2020.

3.3 **Table 1 Return Interview Performance 2019/20**

Missing	Quarter 1		Quarter 2		Quarter 3		Quarter 4	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total number of missing episodes	209		227		185		388	
OLA	45	22%	57	25%	46	25%	58	15%
Sefton	164	78%	170	75%	139	75%	330	85%
(of Sefton episodes) LAC	102	62%	99	58%	69	50%	200	61%
(of Sefton episodes) CP	9	5%	4	2%	0	0%	2	
Number of missing individuals	104		120		93		124	
OLA	27	26%	25	21%	19	20%	22	18%
Sefton	77	74%	95	79%	74	80%	102	82%
(of Sefton individuals) LAC	31	40%	38	40%	27	36%	41	40%
(of Sefton individuals) CP	5	6%	4	4%	0	0%	2	
Maximum Missing (days)	34		9		9		8	
Missing < 1 day	139	67%	174	77%	132	71%	246	63%
1< 2 days	43	21%	29	13%	28	15%	63	16%
2< 3 days	8	4%	11	5%	8	4%	25	6%
> 3 days	18	9%	11	5%	17	9%	54	14%
Youngest Age Missing	10		8		9		5	
Average Age	15		15		15		15	
Interviews (Episodes) - Sefton only								
Offered interview	128	78%	115	68%	91	65%	247	75%
Declined interview	59	36%	49	29%	66	47%	178	54%
Accepted interview	61	37%	63	37%	22	16%	65	20%
Interview Completed **(of those accepted)**	59	97%	63	100%	22	100%	65	100%
Completed within 72 hours **(of those accepted**	17	28%	23	37%	5	23%	21	32%
Completed within 1 week **(of those accepted)**	39	64%	41	65%	9	41%	39	60%
Longest time to interview in days	23		54		40		54	

3.4 **System Changes**

The process for undertaking Return Interviews has been streamlined enabling RIs to take place where appropriate and within timescales. Through,

- Clearer case recording, coding and action tracking
- Management oversight of case allocation
- Staffing resilience and management oversight of processes

3.5 These changes were introduced from January 2020 and explains the apparent increase in missing episodes for Q4. The previous 3 quarters were total missing

episodes minus authorised absence from placement. Q4 is **all** episodes, including authorised absences. Performance for March and the full month of April 2020 is significantly improved.

3.6 Since mid-March 2020 and soon after their implementation, the new arrangements have been affected by contingency measures in dealing with Covid 19. No face to face RI's are taking place. This will be presenting a distorted position in terms of performance, however it has also allowed us to test out the effectiveness of telephone interviews which will be retained, as a secondary back up, to face to face interviews once lockdown restrictions are relaxed. The nature of a return interview is that it should be led by the young person being interviewed and in some circumstances, they may feel more comfortable being interviewed by telephone, video chat or face to face and we should consider our methodology going forward. We would want to test the new arrangements including operating face to face interviews, for a full month before making any longer-term decisions as to the finality of the new arrangements.

4   Further Considerations

4.1 The number of out of borough children that go missing remains high, between 15%-25% of all episodes involve other Local Authority Children (OLA). This has an impact on local services. Other Local Authorities (OLA) that carry out their own RIs only notify us if there is a local safeguarding/exploitation issue. They will not share any other information; therefore we are not always aware of when an RI is offered or completed for OLA children that go missing in Sefton.

4.2 The Covid 19 response of offering RIs by telephone demonstrates there is a suite of options to offer an RI and as alluded to earlier this should be led by the child themselves. As well as face to face, Facetime and Telephone RIs we could explore using an "app" such as "MoMo". This could also be used where the Sefton child is some distance away which would normally result in a Social Worker travelling to conduct the RI. This would be more efficient timewise and may result in a higher take up of interviews, giving us more robust data.

5.   Way Forward

5.1 With any system changes we need a period of evaluation to examine the success (or otherwise) of the changes. The system changes highlighted have all been put in place over a period of time (November 2019-March 2020). We are reviewing performance weekly and making changes immediately where we know things are not working. Unfortunately, with the Covid 19 contingency plans in place we will not get a true performance picture until the service reverts to normal business.

6   <u>Summary and Conclusions</u>

6.1 The Services across Child Criminal and Sexual Exploitation and Missing Children in Sefton work collaboratively as we know the 2 subjects are intrinsically linked. Work in 2020/21 will focus on embedding the new system around missing children to ensure the improved performance is maintained and further improved wherever

possible. A Quality Assurance framework is in place that will see regular audits of this work including :

- A quarterly audit of the children that have the top 5 missing episodes to ensure that correct links with wider CE/MACE plans are established
- A QA of the RIs to establish themes and trends that can be addressed locally
- System audits to ensure that all staff and partners understand the system and are using it to its maximum potential.

Future performance reports will begin to include this qualitative analysis to provide further assurance.

6.2   Governance oversight is provided through regular update reports to the Local Criminal Exploitation sub group of the Safeguarding Children's Board, Children and Young Peoples Partnership Board and Corporate Parenting Board to advise them as to progress.