



SCRUTINY TASK GROUP REPORT

SEX TRADE IN CHELTENHAM

JANUARY 2013

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The issue of the sex trade in Cheltenham, particularly the illegal trade of sexually exploited young or otherwise vulnerable people, was first raised in a motion at Council on 25th June 2012 by Councillor Barbara Driver. Referring to recent exposés in both the national and international press that seem to highlight Cheltenham as a 'hotspot' of activity, the motion called on the Council to take action to address these issues. After a good debate it was decided to request Overview and Scrutiny to investigate the matter further and report back to Council on their findings. Members were invited to join a scrutiny task group to look at this issue, the terms of reference for which are laid out in full at **2.2**. The group was tasked with working with partners to determine if trafficking and sexual exploitation of the vulnerable is a problem on the scale suggested by these news reports, and if so recommend actions that the Council could take to assist in the prevention of these crimes, the protection of their victims and the prosecution of their perpetrators.
- 1.2** This report sets out the findings and recommendations arising from the scrutiny review by the scrutiny task group.

2. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

2.1 Membership of the task group:

- Councillor Barbara Driver (Chair)
- Councillor Andrew Chard
- Councillor Paul Massey
- Councillor Anne Regan
- Councillor Diggory Seacome

2.2 Terms of Reference agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Gain an understanding of the work currently being done by partnerships and the police to address this issue and to establish the extent of the issue in Cheltenham
- Examine how CBC contributes to this work and review whether this is the most effective way that CBC can assist in tackling the issue.
- Examine whether there is anything that needs to be done within Licensing regime to combat this issue
- Examine whether there is anything that needs to be done in respect of the night time economy to combat the sex trade
- Establish a council strategy to identify current working and responsibilities and to guide the council in it's future role in working with partners to address this issue

3. METHOD OF APPROACH

3.1 The task group met on 4 occasions to gather evidence on current practices and the potential need for further action on trafficking for sexual exploitation from the following:

- Detective Chief Inspector Richard Cooper – Deputy Head of Public Protection Bureau
- Detective Inspector Sue Bradshaw : Public Protection Bureau
- Ian Godfrey – Children in Care Service Manager (U16) : Gloucestershire County Council
- Lynne Speak – Operations Manager for Youth Support Services (16+) : Gloucestershire County Council
- Amanda Wilsdon : Gloucestershire Domestic Violence Support and Advocacy Project (GDVSAP)
- Chris Brierley - reporter : BBC Radio Gloucestershire

3.2 We were supported in the review by the following officers:

- Andrew North – Chief Executive : Sponsor for the task group
- Rosalind Reeves – Democratic Services Manager : Facilitator for the task group
- Sidgorée Nelson – Gloucester County Council : Additional support to the task group

3.3 The task group reviewed a variety of evidence including:

- Gloucestershire Constabulary's approach to policing trafficking and sexual exploitation in Gloucestershire and their professional opinion on the scale of these problems in Cheltenham and Gloucestershire as a whole.
- The Public Protection Bureau's multi-agency approach to dealing with prostitution, child protection and trafficking and any special measures they put in place during the Cheltenham Festival race week regarding the licensed and unlicensed sex trade.
- Information on the County Council's Children in Care Service for those under 16 including professional opinion on the scale of trafficking and child sexual exploitation issues in Cheltenham and Gloucestershire.
- Information on the County Council's targeted Youth Support Service for those over 16 and the professional view on the scale of the trafficking and child sexual exploitation problems in Cheltenham and Gloucestershire as a whole.
- A presentation on People Trafficking and Child Sexual Exploitation and supporting question and answer session delivered by GDVSAP that provided information on the national context of trafficking and child sexual exploitation as well as local activities around this issue.
- Excerpts from reports on the sex trade and trafficking for sexual exploitation broadcast on BBC Radio Gloucestershire in 2009. They included interviews with a working girl in Gloucestershire, a punter, and importantly, a victim of trafficking.
- The Dispatches programme '*The Hunt for Britain's Sex Traffickers*' originally broadcast in 2010 that first raised the issue of trafficking for sexual exploitation within Cheltenham.

4.4 Members would like to thank all those, including partner agencies that contributed towards the success of the task group by providing evidence on their activities and suggesting constructive ways to continue addressing issues of trafficking and sexual exploitation in Cheltenham. Members would also like to thank the officers who attended meetings and contributed to the review.

4. OUR FINDINGS

4.1 **What do we mean by trafficking and sexual exploitation?**

4.1.1 This is defined “as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” – Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, United Nations

4.1.2 Sexual exploitation is just one type of trafficking, however the Home Affairs Select Committee believes that 98% of those trafficked into the United Kingdom are trafficked for sexual purposes.

4.2 What did Gloucestershire Police and Public Protection Bureau tell us?

4.2.1 Cheltenham does not have a dedicated team in the form of a vice squad. Strategically, the multi-agency Public Protection Bureau takes the lead on prostitution, child protection and trafficking, but that day-to-day policing of prostitution is conducted by local officers with local knowledge operating locally.

4.2.2 There is no red light district in Cheltenham and most prostitution in the town was said to happen in residential buildings within 1 mile of the town centre. The police response depends on the level of harm each incident is judged to cause, with evidence of drugs, anti-social behaviour, coercion and violence classed as high in harm. Responses are commonly tactics of disruption that vary in strength and pro-activeness depending on the level of harm. Within the last 2 years there had been 11 search warrants executed in relation to suspected brothels.

4.2.3 The starting point for the police is to treat prostitutes as potential victims of exploitation. Only rarely are trafficked or exploited women discovered in Cheltenham, and national and regional comparisons with similar towns appear to show that there is no significant problem to be concerned by. This does not correspond to the media perception of the town, but the police suggested this to be a consequence of the intelligence of prostitution in Cheltenham being good and leading to some highly visible operations.

4.2.4 The police informed the task group that while there is undoubtedly participation by vulnerable young people in the unlicensed sex trade, that this is not a highly visible issue and that evidence suggests it is not a high level of participation.

4.2.5 The police estimated that less than a low percentage of women participating in the trade in Cheltenham are doing so unwillingly due to violent coercion, but that a higher percentage would at one time have been coerced into the trade before reaching Cheltenham.

4.2.6 The police told us that they had seen no evidence of a link between the licensed and unlicensed sex trade.

4.2.7 The Gloucestershire Public Protection Bureau reinforced the message of good intelligence leading to proactive, highly visible policing. They felt that good support for women wanting to move away from the sex trade was also important as typically this could take up to 7 years.

4.2.8 The task group were keen to find out if seasonal events such as ‘race week’ leads to vulnerable young people being targeted for sex. They were informed that the evidence suggests that generally only willing prostitutes move into the area to meet increased demand and that this is not an organised activity. The police would rely on intelligence from other forces to alert them to any organised gangs moving into the town for the event.

4.2.9 The response to ‘race week’ was described as being a mixture of raising awareness, coupled with increased officer presence on the racecourse and checks on licensed premises. .

4.3 Overall what we have learned through the evidence gathering process

4.3.1 The main thrust of evidence heard suggests that to the best of our knowledge, Cheltenham faces no more prevalent a problem of trafficking and sexual exploitation of the vulnerable than any other similar town. This evidence was welcomed by the task group, however it should be noted that all partners working to combat these crimes recognise that our collective knowledge of the scale and extent of these issues in Cheltenham, and indeed the County, is imperfect. An intelligence-led area of policing and of social care intervention, this is due to a variety of factors including victims being reluctant or unable to come forward, and as such there is very much a shared feeling that

the stone remains unturned when it comes to identifying the true extent of these issues.

- 4.3.2** We understand that there is still more to learn as we turn the stone over. But what is already clearly understood by the task group and partners is the sheer horror of these crimes, the devastating effects they can have on victims, and the absolute need to continue to recognise them as organisational priorities and act accordingly. Child sexual exploitation is a particularly heinous example, and one that the task group recognises is receiving the attention it deserves.

4.4 Who does what?

For a full run-down of all the agencies involved in the fight against trafficking and sexual exploitation, and what they are responsible for, please see appendix 2. What we would like to highlight here, is how impressed we have been by the level of work and commitment between partners across the County to address these problems. This is typified by the 2009 creation of the multi-agency Public Protection Bureau in 2009 to lead strategically on issues of prostitution, child protection and trafficking, and demonstrated by new protocols and procedures being put in place to make sure that the early signs of child sexual exploitation are detected.

4.5 Issues with current practices

Helping victims and prosecuting criminals

- 4.5.1** Crimes of trafficking and sexual exploitation are difficult to prosecute. The message from the Police and the Public Protection Bureau is that victims are often understandably too traumatised, distrustful of authority, or scared of their abusers to help build a solid case to present to the Crown Prosecution Service before their limited time in protective custody ends.
- 4.5.2** This message was supported by evidence from GDVSAP, who expressed frustration at the small window of time in which they have to offer emotional support to victims of trafficking or sexual exploitation. The group learned about the National Referral Mechanism and that good practice dictates that adult victims of trafficking need to be moved out of Cheltenham almost immediately after they request help, to keep them safe from their traffickers. They felt it would be good if there was somewhere for the victims of trafficking to stay for a couple of days in Cheltenham.
- 4.5.3** That being the case, all three organisations brought up the idea of some kind of emergency accommodation resource, recognised safe, that would allow the police time to gather the evidence they need for prosecution in a non-threatening environment, and allow the voluntary sector to support victims more effectively. This was an idea the task group was happy to explore further.
- 4.5.4** Officers approached Cheltenham Borough Homes on our behalf. They were supportive of the proposal but felt that there needed to be a clearer assessment of the need before this could be considered in any detail. They suggested that the option of using existing refuges in Gloucestershire should be explored.

Raising awareness of the warning signs of exploitation

- 4.5.5** The importance of raising awareness of sexual exploitation was mentioned by each organisation and individual that gave evidence to the task group. Sexual exploitation along with other sexual offences have a history of being under-reported, and as we heard, this is often because victims cannot or will not report abuse themselves.
- 4.5.6** Whatever the reason: be it lack of English; fear of the Police; fear of their exploiter; fear of the consequences for their family; or even emotional attachment to their exploiter, this makes it all the more important that professionals that might come into contact with victims, and ordinary members of the public be aware of what sexual exploitation is and what the signs of it may be. It is important to note that children and young people often do not even realise that they are being abused.
- 4.5.7** The importance of this kind of awareness-raising is particularly striking when it comes to child sexual exploitation. The task group was pleased to hear about the overwhelmingly positive youth response to educational efforts such as the play 'Chelsea's Choice', designed to raise awareness

of child sexual exploitation amongst young people in years 8 & 9 in Gloucestershire's schools. However, it also heard evidence from both the County Council's Children in Care Services and Youth Support Services about the vulnerability of the young to exploitation.

- 4.5.8** It was stressed that children in care and those otherwise in contact with social services are not safe from exploitation, and that sometimes social workers become concerned by the adults in the lives of young people once they have established relationships with them. Similarly, in talking about the Youth Support Service on offer to children and young people in the County, it was recognised that as a service targeted at the most vulnerable, it often comes into contact with vulnerable children at potential risk of abuse.
- 4.5.9** The social workers and youth workers of these services are then in a good position to spot the signs of exploitation and take action; but only if they are equipped with the tools to do so. Responding to this need, the task group was pleased to hear that all social workers and youth workers are being trained to spot exploitation through use of a new multi-agency screening tool as part of the GSCB's new responsibility to provide training on safeguarding and welfare.
- 4.5.10** It agrees with these professionals that more needs to be done to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and its warning signs amongst those who work with children and young people in non-social care and youth work settings, and ordinary members of the public. The task group is happy to assist with this as it can.

4.6 The extent of the problem

- 4.6.1** This review was kick-started by reports in the press that painted a picture of Cheltenham as a 'hotspot' for trafficking and sexual exploitation. The task group is pleased to note that what evidence we have available seems not to support this suggestion.
- 4.6.2** In their session before the group, both the Police and Public Protection Bureau challenged this view, stating that rarely are trafficked or exploited people discovered in Cheltenham. They estimate that a low percentage of participants in the sex trade in Cheltenham are unwillingly, and in comparing Cheltenham with similar national and regional towns, it was suggested that the media perception of Cheltenham was perhaps a consequence of the Constabulary having launched several highly visible operations in the last few years.
- 4.6.3** We support the Police's decision to be open and public when taking actions such as Operation Pentameter, Pentameter 2 and ad hoc raids to address exploitation, as they demonstrate to the public and potential criminals that where exploitation is suspected it will be acted upon. However we recognise that such public action can increase the public perception of the town as a 'hotspot' of exploitation and it is important to balance raising awareness with unnecessarily damaging the reputation of the town.

4.7 Gaps in our knowledge and the drive to improve

- 4.7.1** Despite this evidence, over the course of this review, the difficulty in establishing a truly robust understanding of the extent of trafficking and sexual exploitation in Cheltenham has been made clear. However, given what we do know locally; international research which seems to suggest that trafficking is the second largest illegal trade in the world and the fastest growing international crime; and the apparent national increase in child exploitation, it is important those organisations (including CBC) with a statutory duty of care towards the vulnerable remain vigilant and continue to enhance our toolkits and be aware of good practice on these issues.
- 4.7.2** We know that as there will always be users of exploitative sexual services willing to overlook the damage their desires are doing to victims; there will always be perpetrators of trafficking and sexual exploitation willing to prey on the vulnerable in order to satisfy that demand. Considering the vast sums of money that can be earned from a single victim, estimated at between £26-52,000 per annum by the Home Affairs Select Committee, this is unsurprising.
- 4.7.3** As we know the market exists and is not going away, and as we know that there is crime going on that we do not know about, the task group believes that the only way to prevent, protect and prosecute is by increasing our efforts at actively searching out these crimes. Several pieces of work are now ongoing to increase our intelligence, for example the scoping analysis of child

sexual exploitation in Gloucestershire currently being undertaken by the Police on behalf of the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children's Board (GSCB). More still needs to be done.

5. OUTCOMES REGARDING TERMS OF REFERENCE SET FOR THE REVIEW

- 5.1** When the O&S committee receives our report, we understand that part of their role is to review whether the task group has achieved the original objectives set by that committee. Therefore we feel it is important to set out what we have achieved regarding each of those objectives.
- 5.2** **Gain an understanding of the work currently being done by partnerships and the police to address this issue and to establish the extent of the issue in Cheltenham**
- 5.3** This was the initial focus of the review as the task group wished to establish at an early stage whether there was a real problem in Cheltenham with sexual exploitation or whether it was simply a matter of perception. Either way it was important for the task group to review the evidence and form an opinion. If there was a problem, then the task group could then go on to consider how it could be tackled and if it was purely a problem of perception then through documenting their findings the task group hoped to give reassurance to the public that Cheltenham was a safe place to live or visit. Broadly speaking the task group established that it was not a significant issue in the town but there was no room for complacency.
- 5.4** **Examine how CBC contributes to this work and review whether this is the most effective way that CBC can assist in tackling the issue.**
- 5.5** At the start of this review, officers from Public Protection were keen to stress to the task group, the limited powers that they had to act on this issue as it was very much police and county led.
- 5.6** The most effective way that CBC can contribute to tackling this issue is by working in partnership with other agencies. The task group noted the council worked in partnership on safeguarding issues and can play a key role in promotion and raising awareness. This will include working with voluntary agencies such as CCP who care for homeless young people.
- 5.7** **Examine whether there is anything that needs to be done within Licensing regime to combat this issue**
- 5.8** CBC as a licensing authority have the power to grant licences for sex establishments such as sex shops, sex cinemas and sexual entertainment venues (such as lap dancing, strip tease and pole dancing clubs). In 2010, the Council adopted special legislation to specifically regulate sexual entertainment venues that, in the past, have been able to rely on temporary licences to host sexual entertainment. As a result of the adoption of the new legislation, premises could no longer rely on temporary licences. Furthermore, whereas before sexual entertainment could be held for up to four days using a temporary licence, the new legislation narrowed that period down to one 24 hour period per month. Any premises wishing to offer sexual entertainment for a period exceeding the 24 which were not licensed. This would be a matter for the police.
- 5.9** The focus for CBC licensing officers is in visiting premises where sexual entertainment is held to ensure it is conducted in an appropriate manner or, where the premises is licensed, to ensuring conditions of the licences are being met. In this they work in partnership with the police and are particularly visible during race week and establishments have been closed down if they break the terms of their license. In this role, the council follows statutory and local procedures. The police also told the working group that they had seen no evidence of a link between the licensed and unlicensed sex trade. Sue Bradshaw from the Gloucestershire Public Protection Bureau commented that there was a good working relationship with the council in carrying out stringent checks on any licensing applications regarding the sex establishments.
- 5.10** CBC have no powers to visit brothels or unlicensed establishments where there might be concerns regarding sexual exploitation as the council had no right of entry to domestic premises which were not licensed. This would be a matter for the police.

- 5.11** On that basis the task group did not feel there was anything more that could be done within the Licensing regime. However they would request that licensing officers along with other relevant officers should be on the look out for signs of unlicensed activity and report any suspicions to the police.
- 5.12** **Examine whether there is anything that needs to be done in respect of the night time economy to combat the sex trade**
- 5.13** The task group recognized that the sex trade is part of the night-time economy and it may be fuelled by drugs and alcohol. However the scope of this review was not to deal with prostitution per se but sexual exploitation. Whilst acknowledging that alcohol and drugs supplied as part of the night-time economy may be a contributory factor to people seeking prostitutes, we saw no evidence that the night-time economy has any close links with sexual exploitation in private establishments.
- 5.14** For this reason the task group did not identify any specific actions in respect of the night-time economy although it may provide potential outlets for promoting awareness and information.
- 5.15** **Establish a council strategy to identify current working and responsibilities and to guide the council in it's future role in working with partners to address this issue**
- 5.16** As mentioned previously, combating sexual exploitation is not a primary role for the council and therefore the task group does not think it necessary to establish a council strategy. However working in partnership to address the issue is very important and we would expect the council to be clear of its role and responsibilities and contribute to the overall action plan of all the partnerships it is involved in.
- 5.17** In summary we feel that all the objectives set have been addressed during the course of the review.

6. CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

- 6.1** In undertaking its assessment of current practices and drawing up recommendations for future actions, the task group consulted widely with partners and other organisations working in the areas of trafficking and sexual exploitation. (Consultees are listed in full in **3.1**).
- 6.2** We involved the Cabinet Member Housing and Safety and he attended one of our meetings. We are pleased to see that he recognises the importance of this issue and has already worked with officers and the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Forum to set up a safeguarding seminar for members on 4 February 2013. This supports our second recommendation and we would encourage all members to attend.
- 6.3** Its findings and recommendations will be presented to the next convenient meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and then go on to Council for further consideration.
- 6.4** Members have already verbally fed back to all those who contributed towards the success of the task group, however all will be sent a copy of the report and invited to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at which this report will be considered.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1** Taking all these findings into consideration, the task group would like to make some recommendations to Council. We recommend:
- i. That the council should work with the Police, Public Protection Bureau and voluntary organisations to identify emergency facilities where vulnerable people can be housed safely for a short period. This will allow for victims to receive appropriate emotional support from trained professionals whilst also allowing the Police a sufficient period of time to interview them and build a case for prosecution.

- ii. That all Councillors should attend awareness sessions on safeguarding issues, particularly to learn about the warning signs that children, young people and vulnerable adults often exhibit if they are being abused or exploited. As community representatives with local knowledge and local intelligence, Councillors are in a good position to contribute towards this agenda.
- iii. That the council assist the Police and Public Protection Bureau in producing, promoting and distributing information to those who may be at risk of sexual exploitation or already be victims of it, to let them know where they can go for help and assistance. The task group recognises the challenges involved in making this information accessible to those who are fearful of authority or many not speak English as a first language.
- iv. That the council support the work of the Public Protection Bureau in raising awareness of prostitution and potential sexual exploitation. One issue focuses around making hoteliers more aware of the potential for their premises to be used for prostitution and exploitation purposes, and in response the task group recommends that the council use its links to the Cheltenham Hoteliers Associate to raise awareness of this issue, particularly in relevant periods such as the run up to 'race week'.
- v. That a greater focus should be placed on producing high quality quantitative data on the scale and nuance of sexual exploitation in Cheltenham, and Gloucestershire as a whole. The task group recognises that the Police are already taking steps to address this issue, however as an intelligence-led area of policing, the importance of understanding the true scale of the issues we face so that we can work together with as partners to coordinate appropriate levels of response, cannot be underestimated.
- vi. That Gloucestershire's new Police and Crime Commissioner and new Police and Crime Panel are sent a copy of this review and its recommendation to make them aware that issues of human trafficking and sexual exploitation remain an area of concern and focus to Cheltenham Borough Council.

8. TAKING FORWARD THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SCRUTINY

- 8.1** In taking forward these recommendations, it is important to recognise that issues relating to human trafficking and sexual exploitation cannot be addressed by Cheltenham Borough Council alone. These are multi-agency issues that require partners to work together to achieve the best outcomes for the people of Cheltenham. As such, the Borough Council will be looking to partners to take forward these recommendations where appropriate.
- 8.2** 7.1 i: the possibility of using vacant Cheltenham Borough Homes properties for this purpose has already been investigated. The initial response has been positive, and we learned that there are already properties for victims of domestic violence that could be made more widely available for this purpose. However more work needs to be done around establishing the true numerical need for such a resource, and also to investigate potential funding sources. The task group believes that in order for the council to progress this request further, the Police and Public Protection Bureau need to provide this information but we feel the council can take a lead on facilitating these discussions..
- 8.3** 7.1 ii: the new multi-agency 'working together protocol' developed for use in Gloucestershire to help all social and youth workers learn the signs of abuse and exploitation could be a possible source of training material for any awareness raising training for our councillors. However, the task group recognises that officers are in the best position to determine how such training is delivered.
- 8.4** 7.1 iii: the importance of preventative and protective actions to combat trafficking and sexual exploitation is seen in both the national and local contexts. As such, the task group would like to see swift action on this recommendation.

- 8.5** 7.1 iv: the task group recognises that officers are in the best position to determine how a communication such as this on behalf of the Council be worded. The group does note however, that the Cheltenham Festival is coming up fast.
- 8.6** 7.1 vi: this is straightforward and should be actioned without delay following Council.
- 8.7** The task group expects to report its findings and recommendations to the next appropriate meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before taking the report to Council for debate. Assuming that our recommendations are accepted by Cabinet, the task group asks to be kept informed of any developments, and also believes that a review of the implementation of the recommendations should be conducted six months after being accepted by Cabinet.

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Appendices	1. Terms of Reference agreed by O&S committee 2. Organisational roles of responsibilities regarding sex trafficking and safeguarding children and vulnerable adults
Background information	Minutes of the Council meeting on 25 June 2012