

# Cutting them free

How is the UK progressing in protecting its children from sexual exploitation?

Believe in children



Barnardo's





# Foreword



My first act on becoming Chief Executive of Barnardo's in January 2011 was to launch the *Cut them free* campaign to call for urgent action for child sexual exploitation to be

tackled in the UK. Although Barnardo's had been supporting victims of this horrific abuse for 17 years, there was still a shocking lack of awareness, leading to exploitation being overlooked or the needs of its incredibly vulnerable victims being sidelined.

Sadly we know that sexual exploitation can exist in every community, in every part of the country. So much more must be done across the UK to identify and cut free all those children being abused in this way, and to help those vulnerable young people who have been preyed upon to rebuild their lives.

The stories of survival I am told by young people being supported by Barnardo's to escape sexual exploitation are distressing, but it is even more heartbreaking to hear how much harder their recovery is when they are let down by the agencies which are supposed to protect them. We need to make sure that all those who work with children, local authorities and national governments recognise sexual exploitation as a form of child abuse.

A survivor of child sexual exploitation, who was supported by Barnardo's, asked at a recent event: 'why can't the authorities spot vulnerable children before abusers do'? Professionals, parents, carers and young people themselves must have a better understanding of how to spot the 'tell-tale signs' of exploitation – and what to do if they suspect a child is being abused.

Our *Cut them free* campaign has called for each of the four nations in the UK to improve their action on tackling child sexual exploitation. In England this has meant asking people to support us in calling for local authorities to make public commitments to tackling sexual exploitation. And we have already seen some real successes – including the naming of a UK minister with lead responsibility for sexual exploitation, and a national action plan for England.

But we will not rest while there are still children suffering this horrific abuse who are being ignored. This report sets out where there has been progress, and highlights how much still needs to be done if we are to cut young people in the UK free from sexual exploitation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Marie Carrie". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Anne Marie Carrie**  
**Chief Executive, Barnardo's**

# Introduction

Barnardo's has been tackling sexual exploitation since 1994 when we opened our first service. Our direct support of victims now extends through 21 services across the UK. Each year we work with over 1,000 children and young people who have been sexually exploited or are at serious risk of exploitation, and the numbers keep rising. In 2010-11 we worked with 1,190 young people affected by sexual exploitation, an increase of 10 per cent on 2009-10, despite funding cuts to our services. We also work to prevent exploitation by raising awareness of the issue among young people, parents and carers, professionals and frontline staff. In 2010-11, we engaged over 6,600 young people and children in awareness raising sessions, and produced *Spot the signs* leaflets to highlight key signs of risk to young people, parents/carers and professionals.

Barnardo's has been influencing policy and practice on sexual exploitation from the start. From the mid-1990s, we successfully challenged the idea that exploited children were criminals involved in prostitution. In the early 2000s, we lobbied for new protections for under-18s and offences relating to grooming, coercion and control were introduced in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. More recently, we influenced the UK and Welsh Government's guidance on safeguarding children from exploitation. By the end of the decade, attitudes to young victims had improved, there was good guidance on protecting young people and greater provisions for prosecuting abusers – but we were still waiting for 'the major step change in policy and practice... needed to recognise sexual exploitation as a pervasive form of abuse from which all children are at risk.'<sup>1</sup>

At the start of 2011, we launched our *Cut them free* campaign to call on the Government and local authorities to take action to protect vulnerable young people and children. Our calls for action were published in *Puppet on a string*. The year since has seen much greater policy and public attention to sexual exploitation. This report sets out the progress and, drawing on a survey of our services across the UK, focuses on what is still needed if young people are to be better protected and supported. Progress in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is outlined and the report considers in further detail how far our campaign calls have been met in England, following on from *Puppet on a string*.



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<sup>1</sup> Barnardo's (2011) *Puppet on a string: The urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation*. Barnardo's, Barkingside.

# What we know about child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is always abusive. It involves children and young people being forced or manipulated into sexual activity. The exploitation involves sexual activity in exchange for something, whether money, gifts or accommodation or less tangible goods like affection or status. It victimises children and young people under 18 – sadly, this abuse is often misunderstood and viewed as consensual. Yet no child can consent to their own abuse, even if they are 16 or 17 years old. We know the abuse is based on an imbalance of power which severely limits victims' options.

The definition of child sexual exploitation below<sup>2</sup> is taken from the UK Government's guidance on child sexual exploitation for England<sup>3</sup> and the national action plan, and is based on the definition agreed by the national working group of organisations tackling child sexual exploitation.

## The UK Government's definition of child sexual exploitation

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'** (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities. Child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition; for example, being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without 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.

Sexual exploitation remains largely hidden, but there is growing evidence it is widespread. Our services alone worked directly with 1,190 young people in 2010-11. In 2009-10, a UK-wide survey by the national working group estimated there were over 3,000 service users across the UK; a third of whom were Barnardo's service users. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre's (CEOP) thematic assessment received 2,000 reports of victims, despite only limited returns from local authorities and police forces.

These figures are just the known cases – we are aware that the number of undetected victims is likely to be much higher. In Northern Ireland, Barnardo's comprehensive 2011 study estimated that one in seven young people are at risk of exploitation. In Wales, Barnardo's has estimated that nine per cent of vulnerable children are at significant risk of sexual exploitation. There is currently no estimate of the prevalence of child sexual exploitation in Scotland – something we are lobbying the Scottish Government to address.

Sexual exploitation occurs throughout the UK, in both rural and urban areas, to boys and young men as well as girls and young women. Overall, 10 per cent of our sexual exploitation service users are male, but a cluster of services have developed local prominence for working with boys and young men, and in those services around a third of service users

2 Definitions of child sexual exploitation used by the UK Government vary but this definition includes the key characteristics.

3 Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation*. DCSF, London.

are male. Our frontline experience and research both show that sexual exploitation can affect young people and children from all backgrounds – however, there are some factors that may make children and young people more vulnerable. In particular young people who go missing frequently and those who live in care are over-represented among sexual exploitation victims. Our 2010-11 survey of our sexual exploitation services found that 44 per cent of all our service users have gone missing<sup>4</sup> on more than one occasion, and 14 per cent have been in care.

These findings are mirrored by the University of Bedfordshire's study, which found that over half of all young people using CSE services on one day in 2011 were known to have gone missing (a quarter over 10 times), and 22 per cent were in care.<sup>5</sup> There are also strong indications in this study and others that young people involved in offending<sup>6</sup> and those excluded from school are also more vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

Our work has identified key indications of vulnerability which may show that young people are being exploited or are at significant risk. Our *Spot the signs* leaflets list these 'tell-tale signs' for young people themselves to be aware of and for parents/carers and professionals to look out for. These key indications of vulnerability include:

- going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late
- regularly missing school or not taking part in education
- appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions
- associating with other young people involved in exploitation
- having older boyfriends or girlfriends
- suffering from sexually transmitted infections
- mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing
- drug and alcohol misuse
- displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour.



4 'Missing' refers to occasions when a child or young person's whereabouts are unknown, for hours or days; 'missing' does not include a child or young person staying out for a short time after they should be at home.

5 Jago, S et al (2011) *What's going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? How local partnerships respond to child sexual exploitation*. University of Bedfordshire, Bedford.

6 UCL (2010) *Briefing document: CSE and Youth Offending*. Jill Dando Institute of Security and Crime Science, UCL, London.

7 Jago, S et al (2011) *What's going on to safeguard children and young people from sexual exploitation? How local partnerships respond to child sexual exploitation*. University of Bedfordshire, Bedford.

# A changing picture: emerging trends noted by Barnardo's services

Barnardo's annual survey of its 21 child sexual exploitation services tracks local variation and emerging trends. It enables us to assess how child sexual exploitation is changing and informs our practice, research and policy.

## **Models of exploitation**

There is no single form of child sexual exploitation. Young women and girls are being exploited by older men who appear to be their boyfriend, but this is only one model of sexual exploitation. Older 'girlfriends', peers (some of whom have been abused), loose networks of abusers, more organised groups and some criminal gangs have been identified as perpetrators. Our 21 services find that sexual exploitation varies between areas and its form can change quickly. As in previous years, the 2010-11 survey reiterated this diversity.

Most services noted significant change in the local form of sexual exploitation – but not in the same direction. Eight said that peer-based exploitation was becoming more common, while two said that they were seeing more abuse by 'older boyfriends' again, after a rise in peer-based or opportunistic exploitation. Barnardo's has found that child sexual exploitation is much more likely to happen in private than in public, and this year's survey showed that street-based grooming and exploitation remains rare. But services reported increased exploitation in semi-public areas such as parks and cafes.

Echoing this, three services highlighted the role of parties in putting groups of young people at significant risk of exploitation. Whether hosted by older young people or risky adults, these events are perceived as 'safe' by young people as they feel protected by being in a group. As one manager said: 'Friendship groups or pairs

[are] going to known risky people's houses feeling this will make them safer, but [it is] putting more young people at risk'. Services stress the need for greater preventative work to raise young people's awareness of sexual exploitation, judgement of risk and knowledge of how to keep safe. In particular, young people need to be aware that ready availability of alcohol and drugs may increase their vulnerability to abuse.

## **Organised exploitation and internal trafficking**

The extent of organised exploitation has become increasingly apparent to our services in the last three years. Organised sexual exploitation is the most sophisticated form of this abuse, based on links between abusers, and often involves victims being moved to other cities or towns for exploitation (referred to as 'internal trafficking'). The 2010-11 survey showed that services continue to be concerned about the extent of networked and organised exploitation: the same adults linked to victims who do not know each other; abusers fostering links between vulnerable children or young people; and victims themselves being forced to engage vulnerable peers, for example through links made in secure accommodation.

Services have continued to see the movement of young people for sex within their region and across the UK. In some cases, businesses are being used as hubs for the organisation of this exploitation. Overall, the survey showed that one in six of our service users are known to have been moved for exploitation within the UK, but in some services many more service users have been moved. Four services reported that a quarter of service users had been moved, and for another

three services this rises to half of all service users.

### **Involvement of peers in exploitation**

Eight services reported an increase in exploitation by peers – either directly as abusers or indirectly by linking victims with abusers. It can be difficult to distinguish between young people’s involvement in direct and indirect peer exploitation, and some young people may be involved in both. Direct peer exploitation refers to young people who actively exploit their peers themselves. Indirect peer exploitation refers to young people engaging their peers in exploitation, but not initiating the abuse. Often these young people are victims of exploitation, or fear abuse, and are drawing others in as protection. Sometimes they are pressured into bringing others to be abused. Indirect exploitation typically involves young people of similar ages, but some services reported that young teenagers are increasingly used to engage older teenagers in exploitation, making the initial contact so potential victims feel safer than they might if approached by an adult.

### **Exploitation of younger children**

Services are still seeing young children drawn into this form of abuse. Five services raised it as a major concern, identifying children as young as 11 at high risk of sexual exploitation, although the majority were working with children from 13 years old.

### **The role of technology in exploitation**

Exploited young people and children are typically abused in person, but sexual exploitation also takes place over the internet, through mobile phones, online gaming and instant messaging. This is not surprising given how central technology is now to young people’s lives, and the issue has long been a major

concern for our services. However, the services reported that the scale of online and mobile abuse has markedly increased even since 2010. Almost all services reported it as an increasing priority, and some have identified that the majority of their service users were initially groomed via social networking sites and mobile technology.

‘The use of technology is such a big issue. I hear of young people who post inappropriate pictures of themselves on the internet through the encouragement of others. I hear about grooming of young people by older adults over the internet which progresses onto mobiles. Sexual bullying and threats over the internet and mobiles, we hear about this all the time.’ [Service manager]

Young people, parents/carers and professionals need to be more aware of how such technology can be used by abusers. Our services help young people to understand what could be risky in the many associations, conversations and images they are surrounded by when using this technology. In addition, Barnardo’s lobbied for an amendment<sup>8</sup> to the current Education Bill, to include guidance to schools not to automatically delete explicit images from mobile phones. Images may constitute evidence of abuse for any subsequent prosecution, and could also raise safeguarding concerns.

### **Prosecutions**

Although legislation has created offences around child sexual exploitation,<sup>9</sup> there have been very few prosecutions so far. In 2010, only 57 people (over 21 years old) were found guilty of offences relating to sexual exploitation in England and Wales – and these include those found guilty for offences relating to trafficking adults.<sup>10</sup> The official statistics show a very small

8 Our call for the guidance was raised by Lady Benjamin and acknowledged by Lord Hill.

9 England and Wales: Sexual Offences Act 2003. Northern Ireland: Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008. Scotland: Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2005.

10 Ministry of Justice (2011) *Criminal Statistics England and Wales, 2010* (Table S5.7). MoJ, London.



increase on 2009, when the total was 55. However, convictions for abuse of children through prostitution and pornography have risen more markedly over the last year, from 32 to 47.

Our services also indicate that there has been some slight increase in the prosecution rate – with offenders often tried for other offences such as rape or sexual activity with a child under 13 or under 16. Across the UK, our services knew of 137 police investigations relating to their service users as victims of crimes. Of these, seven are ongoing and 40 have been taken to prosecution – mostly for grooming via the internet (12 cases), abuse of children through prostitution (six cases), sex with a child under 13 (six cases) and rape (five cases). Of the 37 prosecutions which have concluded, two-thirds (24) have resulted in conviction – eight for internet grooming, five for abuse through prostitution and three for rape.

It is concerning that the conviction rate is still lower than it should be, depressed by only partial understanding of child sexual exploitation within

the criminal justice system which can result in misunderstandings of the relationship between victim and offender and insufficient attention to the needs of the young victim in giving evidence. Prosecutions can be traumatic for young victims, and Barnardo's knows that the invasive nature of the court cases can stop young people from reporting the horrific abuse or from providing evidence. Until young victims are better supported through this daunting and potentially damaging process, for example by making better use of the available special measures for court, there will only be marginal increases in the number of prosecutions.

As well as seeking prosecutions, police can try to disrupt exploitation – for example by issuing abduction notices, which state that the offender must not be in the company of the young person. Disruption tactics are becoming more widely used by police – either in place of or alongside efforts to prosecute. Our services were aware of at least 16 notices<sup>11</sup> issued to abusers, but also said that much more could be done to disrupt and deter abuse by using such tactics more widely.



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11 Six abduction notices, five harbouring notices and five sex offender prevention orders.

# National and local progress on sexual exploitation

## 2011: A busy year

When Barnardo's launched its *Cut them free* campaign at the start of 2011, we welcomed the greater interest that was being shown in identifying and tackling CSE, but said that we were still waiting for 'the major step change in policy and practice... needed to recognise sexual exploitation as a pervasive form of abuse from which all children are at risk.'<sup>12</sup>

From the start, 2011 did see far greater policy and public attention to sexual exploitation – this report will consider whether it has amounted to the major step change required.



## Progress across the UK Nations

So by late 2011 there had been some marked progress on sexual exploitation, specifically on the evidence base, governmental recognition of the problem and provisions for action. Much of this had already been achieved in Wales, so the greatest progress in 2011 was made in England, but Barnardo's campaigns in Scotland and Northern Ireland also catalysed change.

<sup>12</sup> Barnardo's (2011) *Puppet on a string: The urgent need to cut children free from sexual exploitation*. Barnardo's, London.

<sup>13</sup> CEOP (2011) *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Breaking down the barriers to understanding child sexual exploitation*. CEOP, London.

<sup>14</sup> Barnardo's (2011) *Not a world away. The sexual exploitation of children and young people in Northern Ireland*. Barnardo's Northern Ireland, Belfast.




**Barnardo's Northern Ireland** published a report exposing the extent of child sexual exploitation in Northern Ireland (NI). *Not a world away* found that sexual exploitation is an issue of concern for almost two-thirds of girls in residential care homes in NI who were included in the study.

It also found that sexual exploitation affects both male and females and that, in half of the cases identified, the abuse lasted at least one year and in over 16 per cent, it lasted three or more years.

In light of these findings, Barnardo's Northern Ireland is calling for the NI Policing Board to incorporate child protection including sexual exploitation as a priority in the forthcoming Policing Plans and for the Health and Social Care Board to draw together an action plan to tackle sexual exploitation head on. Supporters are being asked to sign up to a petition to the NI Policing Board to urge them to make child sexual exploitation a priority at [www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree)

**Barnardo's Cymru** welcomed the review of the implementation of new Child Sexual Exploitation Safeguarding Guidance (2011) being undertaken by the Welsh Government – this is an important step in addressing the gap between policy and practice in relation to child sexual exploitation safeguarding in Wales. The Welsh Government commissioned Barnardo's Cymru to deliver implementation support events across Wales in early 2011 and all Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCBs) attended. Examples of good practice are available and we hope that new collaboration arrangements being put forward by the Welsh Government will support the growth of good practice across Wales. Our Seraf service is doing innovative work to assist local authorities in their workforce development in relation to child sexual exploitation by the sharing of skills, knowledge and expertise through our new Practitioner Mentoring Programs.

Unfortunately a high proportion of the children and young people who are identified as needing support still have those needs unmet in Wales. There is a continued need for better multi-agency responses to children and young people who go missing so that risk of sexual exploitation can be identified earlier and children and young people can be better safeguarded from this abuse. Barnardo's Cymru Seraf Service is working with the police and a number of local authorities to support the development of better responses to children and young people who go missing. Briefings on internal trafficking and child sexual exploitation are being delivered to three police forces across Wales.



**Barnardo's Scotland** has been calling for the *Vulnerable children and young people: sexual exploitation through prostitution guidelines* (2003) to be updated along the lines of recent developments in Wales and England, and for action to be taken on the recommendation in the existing guidelines that research be carried out into the nature and scope of child sexual exploitation in Scotland.

These guidelines should be revised and refreshed to take account of recent legal changes, and also to assess the role of the internet and text messages in child sexual exploitation which our services have identified as having changed significantly in recent years.

Barnardo's recently submitted a petition to the Scottish Parliament, which was signed by over 3,000 people. The petition calls on the Scottish Government to:

- carry out research on the nature of sexual exploitation in Scotland
- tell us what their progress is in tackling this issue
- develop robust new policies to tackle sexual exploitation.

There is still the need to continue to push for this progress in Scotland in 2012.

In **England**, Barnardo's called for a national action plan to tackle child sexual exploitation and a lead government minister, and both have been met with the appointment of the Children's Minister as lead on child sexual exploitation and the launch of the national action plan. In addition, Barnardo's has issued a direct call to local authorities to publicly commit to addressing child sexual exploitation; this commitment is made by pledging to develop a local action plan and assess their progress in protecting young people from child sexual exploitation against the following key points:

- What system is in place to monitor the number of young people at risk of sexual exploitation?
- Does the Local Safeguarding Children's Board have a strategy in place to tackle child sexual exploitation?
- Is there a lead person with responsibility for coordinating a multi-agency response?
- Are young people able to access specialist support for children at risk of sexual exploitation?
- How are professionals in the area trained to spot the signs of child sexual exploitation?

See the local authority checklist for more detail at [www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthefree\\_labriefing.pdf](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthefree_labriefing.pdf)

Throughout 2012, Barnardo's will be continuing to urge local authorities to take action to tackle this form of abuse.

Having a ministerial lead and a national action plan for child sexual exploitation were key policy calls in our *Cut them free* campaign for England. We called for a lead minister ‘to provide dedicated attention to this issue’. The appointment of the minister has given greater prominence to child sexual exploitation as a national responsibility in England, and we welcome the attention that the minister has given it so far. Barnardo’s will scrutinise this to see whether it is maintained.

We called for a national action plan ‘to embed guidance and overcome the barriers to more effective local delivery’. The publication of the national action plan has set out in broad terms how the responsibility is to be shared across central government and by local authorities, police forces and other agencies. Barnardo’s welcomes the plan, especially its emphasis on cross-departmental working to tackle sexual exploitation, its proposals to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and improve training for some professionals, and recognition of the need to improve the prosecution rate and experience for victims. However, much in the plan is ongoing rather than new, and relatively few of the new actions **commit** government departments or statutory agencies to specific changes. This means that further progress is largely dependent on goodwill, which is a concern during these challenging times.

How far the national action plan met our calls is set out against our four recommendations.

### **1. Raise awareness to improve early identification of child sexual exploitation.**

#### **National action plan commitments:**

- Barnardo’s calls were heard with specific commitments to awareness raising among professionals, young

people and parents and training for some frontline staff.

#### **Work to do:**

- Barnardo’s will monitor how these commitments and intentions are implemented. In particular, we will scrutinise the Department for Education’s assessment of how it could help LSCBs raise awareness and understanding of child sexual exploitation.

### **2. Improve statutory responses and the provision of services. National action plan commitments:**

- Barnardo’s calls have been recognised in the emphasis on improving responses to this abuse but there is limited mention of the need for additional specialist services.

#### **Work to do:**

- Barnardo’s will assess how the Department for Education is helping LSCBs to track and respond to sexual exploitation, especially whether it is encouraging LSCBs to establish a child sexual exploitation working/ sub-group or appoint a lead officer to co-ordinate action.
- Barnardo’s will respond to the Home Office’s proposals for increased funding of rape/sexual abuse support services, emphasising the need to ensure this funding will also provide specifically for victims of sexual exploitation.

### **3. Improve the evidence.**

#### **National action plan commitments:**

- Barnardo’s calls are partly recognised in the acknowledgement that ‘areas cannot conclude [child sexual exploitation] is not an issue for them in the absence of a proper assessment’ (p10), and the intention to support LSCBs in mapping levels. However, there is no provision for a national

reporting mechanism or standardised process by which services can share concerns with police.

Work to do:

- Barnardo's welcomes the recognition of a need to map child sexual exploitation levels and to monitor ongoing prevalence, using information from all relevant agencies. However, we are disappointed at the absence of a national reporting mechanism.
- Barnardo's will encourage the Department for Education and the Home Office to consider how systems can be established for information sharing between services and the police, as part of the work to improve responses to sexual exploitation. We will also assess whether adequate resources are given to making this local data into a national picture.

#### **4. Improve prosecution procedures.**

##### **National action plan commitments:**

- Barnardo's calls are acknowledged in the emphasis on young witnesses' welfare as a priority throughout prosecutions, and on improving police and justice agencies' effectiveness in prosecutions. However, there are few new commitments.

Work to do:

- Barnardo's will ask the Ministry of Justice to show how their intentions to improve support for young witnesses and responses to intimidation have been implemented.
- We will monitor whether pre-trial video-recorded cross-examination is used, and will ask the Ministry of Justice to explain its decision if the provisions are not used.
- We will respond to the consultation for the review of victims' services.

The Department for Education will be publishing a review of progress on the

national action plan in Spring 2012. Barnardo's hopes that this review will maintain momentum on tackling child sexual exploitation, but we will continue to monitor progress against our campaign calls. Specifically, we will assess whether the emphasis placed on **local** responsibility for tackling child sexual exploitation has led LSCBs to improve their responses – or the fact that the national action plan did not require action from LSCBs has allowed momentum to slip.

### **Local progress on sexual exploitation**

In England, the updated government guidance on addressing child sexual exploitation<sup>15</sup> sets out how Local Safeguarding Children Boards and statutory agencies should act to protect young people. However, it is evident that the guidance is only being used in some areas and not in full. The University of Bedfordshire's comprehensive study of local action over child sexual exploitation found that only a third of LSCBs were implementing the guidance. Such variation in local awareness of the issue and statutory responses to it is also clear from Barnardo's evaluation of our Recovery Project which delivers intensive support to victims of exploitation across London.<sup>16</sup> Few of the 25 boroughs which have received the service so far follow the pan-London protocol on safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation, which was jointly developed by all 33 London boroughs.<sup>17</sup>

Our services show that this difference in awareness and approach is mirrored with LSCBs across England and Wales (which has comprehensive guidance on sexual exploitation) and in equivalent child protection bodies in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Overall, the services described their links with LSCBs or their

15 DCSF (2009) *Safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation*. DCSF, London.

16 This Metropolitan Police Service-funded provision runs from 2008-2012.

17 London Safeguarding Children Board (2006) *Safeguarding children abused through sexual exploitation*. London Councils, London.

equivalents in positive terms – half said they had ‘very good’ relationships. But there were clear gaps and some services indicated concerns that child protection bodies are downgrading child sexual exploitation as a priority, even in areas with an established specialist service highlighting the issue.

Research from Barnardo’s services shows what enables young people to be protected from sexual exploitation and supported if they have been exploited. There are five clear lessons from our longer-term work. Firstly, raising awareness among young people and practitioners is crucial in preventing exploitation and identifying victims – early identification and intervention is known to significantly reduce the potential harm of sexual exploitation. Secondly, a clear multi-agency system to identify and respond to local cases of exploitation is essential if victims and those at risk are to receive timely and appropriate interventions. Thirdly, having a lead worker to co-ordinate the multi-agency response can make planning and delivering it more efficient. Fourthly, gathering and assessing data on levels and risks of child sexual exploitation is fundamental to understanding the profile of exploitation, and guiding the response. Fifthly, specialist services are best placed to provide the necessary support; sexual health services, CAMHS, and other statutory agencies play a key role but may not develop a fuller picture of the young person’s situation.

Barnardo’s *Cut them free* campaign includes a direct call to local authorities in England to publicly commit to addressing sexual exploitation. This commitment is made by pledging to develop a local action plan, and signing up to a minimum standard of action based on these five key elements – drawn from the lessons above.<sup>18</sup> Barnardo’s

five-step checklist provides English local authorities with a way to assess their progress in protecting young people from sexual exploitation:

### Checklist for English local authorities

- What system is in place to monitor the number of young people at risk of child sexual exploitation?
- Does your LSCB have a strategy in place to tackle child sexual exploitation?
- Is there a lead person with responsibility for coordinating multi-agency response?
- Are young people able to access specialist support for children at risk of child sexual exploitation?
- How are professionals in your area trained to spot the signs of child sexual exploitation?

Barnardo’s has contacted all local authorities and all councillors setting out the importance of tackling child sexual exploitation and asking them to ensure that their local authority does sign up to the *Cut them free* commitment. The public can also contact their council through our campaign website to ask them to commit to taking action. By late December, over 7,000 people had joined the campaign, showing the strength of public concern over sexual exploitation. Despite this considerable public support, and Barnardo’s contacting councils directly, only 61 of England’s 152 local authorities had joined the campaign with a public commitment to tackle sexual exploitation. Our campaigning work will continue to ensure that local authorities throughout England commit to taking real action.

<sup>18</sup> [www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree](http://www.barnardos.org.uk/cutthemfree)



# Recommendations to maintain momentum and ensure change

Much has been done this year to raise the profile of child sexual exploitation as a priority concern for the UK, and specifically for authorities which have local responsibility for protecting young people. However, we are yet to see how this effort has translated into action, so Barnardo's and all agencies focused on tackling sexual exploitation will need to ensure that the momentum is maintained and leads to real change.

In **Northern Ireland** urgent action is still needed to protect young people from this abuse. More effective statutory responses would be in place if the Northern Ireland Policing Board incorporates child protection including sexual exploitation as a priority in the forthcoming Policing Plans to recognise the critical importance of this area of work and if the Health and Social Care Board draws together an action plan to tackle sexual exploitation head on.

To tackle the problem more effectively in **Scotland**, the Scottish Government needs to review and update the existing guidelines, dating from 2003, and commission research so the nature and scope of child sexual exploitation in Scotland can be fully understood. A new robust set of policies will be required to tackle sexual exploitation and the Scottish Government should set out any progress they make in addressing this issue.

In **Wales** local authorities must address the gap between those numbers of children and young people who are identified as needing support and those who still have those needs unmet. Police and local authorities should also continue to work to improve multi-agency responses for children and young people who go missing so that risk of child sexual exploitation can be identified earlier and children and young people can be

better safeguarded from abuse through child sexual exploitation.

In **England** work must continue to focus the efforts of local authorities and LSCBs on tackling this abuse, and it must be acknowledged that the four key changes called for in *Puppet on a string* still need significant work before they are met.

## **Raise awareness**

The national action plan for England sets out many ways that awareness is to be raised – among young people, parents/carers and professionals. However, there is some evidence from our services that agencies have reduced their uptake of awareness raising and training on child sexual exploitation over the past year. Our services delivered school sessions on child sexual exploitation to 6,814 young people across the UK (6,676 in England) but this was a third fewer than in 2009-10. Acknowledgement and recognition of child sexual exploitation remains very patchy – even in areas where Barnardo's services are highlighting the problem – so this trend is worrying.

Barnardo's welcomes the Government's intention to highlight the issue of exploitation in its review of Personal Social Health and Economic Education,<sup>19</sup> but we hope that other education providers which are not subject to the guidance, such as academies, will also raise awareness of child sexual exploitation among their pupils. We urge all local authorities to provide information and training on sexual exploitation to both frontline and strategic professionals responsible for young people's welfare. We will be monitoring the implementation of plans to improve the training of police officers and social workers.

## **Improve support**

Young people who are sexually exploited need timely and tailored interventions if

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<sup>19</sup> This is also delivered in short-stay schools, formerly known as pupil referral units.

they are to be cut free from their abuse. The national action plan encourages LSCBs to assess the local need and to develop a response strategy – but it does not oblige them to do so. We are concerned that many will continue to sideline the issue, especially given severe budget cuts. Investing in early identification and specialist support could reduce overall expenditure by many agencies. An evaluation by Barnardo's and Pro Bono Economics<sup>20</sup> has shown that spending on specialist services potentially saves taxpayers' money; for every £1 spent on Barnardo's child sexual exploitation services, £12 may be saved by the Exchequer over the longer term.

As a minimum, local authorities should devise a multi-agency strategy incorporating police, social services, health and education and appoint a lead officer to co-ordinate responses. Barnardo's knows that one of the most successful strategies for addressing exploitation is to bring specialist support services to work alongside police and, where possible, social or health services. The study by the University of Bedfordshire illustrates this. Barnardo's will continue our campaign, calling on local authorities to protect young people from child sexual exploitation, and we will continue working with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Local Government Association to inform police and council responses to this abuse.

#### **Improve the evidence**

Recent research has improved our understanding of how widespread the problem of child sexual exploitation

is – and has also highlighted that there is much still to do to raise awareness of the issue. The English Office of the Children's Commissioner's inquiry into child sexual exploitation by groups and gangs will considerably extend the evidence of these forms of exploitation, and contribute to the overall picture. The national action plan also mentions the importance of developing a fuller understanding of the levels and forms of child sexual exploitation, but it is not clear how this is to be achieved. CEOP has ongoing responsibility for centrally collating local data, and can call for local authorities to provide their evidence. However, data analysis would need to be adequately resourced – we will wait to see whether the national picture can be updated.

#### **Improve prosecutions**

Prosecutions have been a particular cause for concern – there are low rates of successful prosecutions and the process can be a negative experience for young victims. Our services indicate that some police forces are becoming far better in their engagement with young victims and are often supportive through the preparation for trial and the prosecution. However, cross-examination can still be very traumatic. Barnardo's welcomes the national action plan's emphasis on enabling young victims and witnesses to give their best evidence in court. However, we are concerned that there will still be limited understanding of this complex issue within the courts and the wider criminal justice system. Barnardo's will be monitoring whether the efforts do indeed improve the prosecution process and enhance victim support.

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<sup>20</sup> Barnardo's and Pro Bono Economics (2011) *Reducing the risk, cutting the cost: An assessment of the potential savings from Barnardo's interventions for young people who have been sexually exploited*. Barnardo's, Barking. <http://www.barnardos.org.uk/~/media/Files/Research/Reducing-the-risk-cutting-the-cost.pdf>



***Cutting them free***

*How is the UK progressing in protecting its children from sexual exploitation?*

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Some images posed by models.

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