

Birmingham City Council

City Council

16 April 2024



Subject: Scrutiny Inquiry on Child Criminal Exploitation: How are the Council and its partners working together to reduce the risks of exploitation for young people?

Report of: Cllr. Des Hughes, Chair of Inquiry and Deputy Chair, Education, Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Kerry Jenkins, Chair of Education, Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

If relevant, state which appendix is exempt, and provide exempt information paragraph number or reason if confidential:

Not Applicable

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 “Criminal exploitation is child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes. One of its forms is County Lines which is the “police term for urban gangs exploiting young people into moving drugs from a hub, normally a large city, into other markets - suburban areas and market and coastal towns - using dedicated mobile phone lines or “deal lines”...This can involve children being trafficked away from their home area, staying in accommodation and selling and manufacturing drugs” ([NSPCC](#)). Children who are criminally exploited may also be sexually exploited. It is also a form of modern slavery.
- 1.2 The Scrutiny Inquiry was established in July 2022 by the Education and Children’s Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The terms of reference for the inquiry set the question: “How are the Council and Partners working together to reduce the risks of criminal exploitation for young people?”.

1.3 The Scrutiny Inquiry identified the following themes from the evidence set out in Appendix 1:

- Definition and Scale
- Early Intervention with specific regard to role of the community; youth services; transitions to adulthood; Missing Children and Education.
- Supporting young people to exit exploitation
- Enforcement
- Strategy and Governance

1.4 Based on this evidence, the inquiry group proposes 15 recommendations to the Executive.

2 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that:

2.2 Recommendations R01 to R15, set out in Appendix 1, be approved and that the Executive be requested to pursue their implementation.

3 Background

3.1 The Inquiry on Child Criminal Exploitation was agreed as part of the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2022/23 and due to the range and depth of engagement this work continued into 2023/24.

3.2 The Inquiry Task and Finish Group considered evidence from 12 organisations and services using a combination of face to face sessions and written submissions. The report attached as Appendix 1 provides a summary of the evidence received.

4 Options considered and Recommended Proposal

4.1 Appendix 1 sets out the recommendations agreed by the Inquiry Task and Finish Group.

4.2 The Governance Review of Birmingham City Council by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny set out that the scrutiny work programme should focus on the Council's improvement and recovery priorities. The work of this inquiry aligns with the priority to ensure safe and effective delivery of key services supporting vulnerable people.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 This inquiry relates specifically to three key duties placed upon Councils:

- All Councils have a duty under the [Children Act 2004](#) to work with local police and health partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area. In Birmingham, the Birmingham Children's Trust is

responsible for carrying out assessments of children deemed at risk of significant harm and work with partners to put in place plans to keep children safe where necessary.

- As corporate parents, councils are also responsible for supporting and advocating for their children in care and care leavers. Councils will need to ensure that these children and young people are fully supported if they are at risk of exploitation, including ensuring they are in appropriate accommodation.
- Councils also have a duty under the [Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#) to work with partners to develop a community safety strategy that reflects priorities in their local area around tackling crime and disorder, and work with their Police and Crime Commissioner, including through the Police and Crime Panel which is responsible for scrutinising local police and crime plans.
- The more recent [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022](#) introduces duties for public bodies such as councils, police, health and education to tackle and prevent serious violent crime.

5.2 The Privacy and Information Law Team within the Council's Legal and Governance directorate will be able to provide specific support around the implementation of Recommendation 10. Legal and Governance directorate may also provide support around responding to Recommendation 13 too.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 The Inquiry recommendations recognise the financial pressures the Council is facing and set out that the implementation of recommendations will be within existing resources and capacity available. There is no request for additional resource or capacity to implement the recommendations.

7 Public Sector Equality Duty

7.1 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

7.2 The Committee should ensure that it addresses these duties by considering them during work programme development, the scoping of work, evidence gathering and making recommendations. This should include considering: How policy issues impact on different groups within the community, particularly those that share a relevant protected characteristic; Whether the impact on particular

groups is fair and proportionate; Whether there is equality of access to services and fair representation of all groups within Birmingham; Whether any positive opportunities to advance equality of opportunity and/or good relations between people are being realised.

7.3 The Committee should ensure that equalities comments, and any recommendations, are based on evidence. This should include demographic and service level data and evidence of residents/service-users views gathered through consultation.

7.4 During the Inquiry, evidence indicated that unconscious bias on the part of referring professionals, or even within the community itself, may mean that indicators of Child Criminal Exploitation are not recognised, and referrals made. For example, behaviour indicating a girl is being exploited is not understood in this context, boys who are Black are perceived through the lens of adultification, or children are too young to be victims of exploitation. Recommendation 5 specifically calls for organisations to address this in their training and development offer to staff.

8 Other Implications

8.1 **How are the recommended decisions consistent with the City Council's priorities, plans and strategies?**

8.2 The strategic importance of addressing children and young people's mental health is reflected in the Council's Grand Challenges relating to Community Resilience, Cohesion and Living Standards plus Opportunities for Children and Young People and the City Council's Corporate Plan priorities:

- Support and enable young people to thrive
- Protect and Safeguard vulnerable citizens

9 Background Papers

9.1 Birmingham City Council Corporate Plan [Council Plan and Budget | Birmingham City Council](#)

10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1: Scrutiny Inquiry on Child Criminal Exploitation: How are the Council and its partners working together to reduce the risks of exploitation for young people?

10.2 Appendix 2: Executive Commentary