

To: **Executive**
18 July 2023

Overview and Scrutiny Review of Child Criminal Exploitation
Councillor Birch, Chair Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present the Executive with the findings of the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel's review into child criminal exploitation which have been endorsed by the Overview & Scrutiny Commission, and to seek approval of the Panel's recommendations.
- 1.2 To provide the advice of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer (SSO) to inform the Executive's decision whether to agree the Panel's recommendations.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the Executive considers whether to agree the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel's recommendations as set out in the Panel report (attached as Appendix A) and paragraph 5.7 of this report, taking into account the comments of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer.**

3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel concluded their findings based on the evidence considered and review that was undertaken. The review report is attached as Appendix A.
- 3.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has endorsed the review recommendations, taking into account the review report and the views of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer.
- 3.3 The comments from the relevant officer set out in paragraph 7 of this report do not indicate any concerns with the proposed recommendations.

4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Executive could decide:
- to agree the recommendations as set out in the Panel's report
 - to agree the recommendation in part
 - to ask for further work to be undertaken recognising that this would delay the Panel's next piece of work
 - to note the Panel report

5 Supporting Information from the Statutory Scrutiny Officer

- 5.1 It is the role of the SSO to advise the Council on any issues or concerns that may arise about the operation of the scrutiny function and the SSO may on occasion be required to make a determination about what the law says and how this should be applied to any particular situation. In carrying out this statutory role, there is a need

to have a nuanced and meaningful understanding of the scrutiny function in order to accurately make judgments about its operation when disagreements or other issues arise.

- 5.2 The SSO is responsible for ensuring that the scrutiny function is adequately resourced and that service departments and partners are contributing sufficiently to reviews to ensure that they are effective.
- 5.3 The SSO is also responsible for providing advice to the Commission and Executive on whether the recommendations within review reports are robust, taking account of resource, legal, climate change, equalities, health and wellbeing and strategic risk implications.
- 5.4 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission commissioned the Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel to carry out a review into Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) as part of the overview and scrutiny four-year work programme, which has been developed to track themes within the new Council Plan.
- 5.5 In support of this review, a broad range of witnesses gave evidence putting the Panel in a good position to use this intelligence to frame the review and produce insightful recommendations.
- 5.6 The Panel was supported by Joey Gurney, Governance and Scrutiny Officer who supported the Panel to draw up the scope of the review and prepare an evidence pack of relevant information; to facilitate a number of Panel sessions to interview a range of contributors; to draw out findings from the Panel's investigation, and to prepare a review report. This involved in the region of 300 hours of scrutiny officer time and 10 hours of Panel meetings.
- 5.7 The Commission considered the Panel's recommendations on 16 March 2023 and endorsed them for referral to the Executive. The reasons for making these recommendations are set out in the Panel report. These recommendations are:
 1. Collaborate with Thames Valley Police and other relevant partners to develop and implement regular Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) awareness campaigns within schools, targeting both children and parents. **12 months.**
 2. Engage with local businesses and community organisations to develop strategies designed to both raise awareness of CCE and promote the creation of safer places for children and young people. **12 months.**
 3. Conduct a comprehensive review of the website to enhance its usability and accessibility in relation to child exploitation. Ensure the information on the relevant web pages is clear and concise, and that there are links to relevant external resources. Engage with children and young people during the process and consider 'Good Practice' from other Local Authorities identified by the Education, Skills, Growth O&S Panel. **6 months.**
 4. Develop and implement a survey focused on CCE for safeguarding leads from schools in the borough. Use the findings to identify gaps and areas for improvement in existing policies and practices relating to CCE. Consider working with the Education, Skills, Growth O&S Panel on this. **6 months.**

5. Conduct regular awareness campaigns on the use of cannabis and its impact on vulnerable children and young people. Use a variety of communication channels such as social media, print materials and public events to reach a wider audience. **6 months.**
 6. Work with partners to develop and maintain a map or database of vulnerable areas and hot spots related to CCE. **12 months.**
- 5.8 In endorsing the Panel's recommendations the Commission also took account of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer's views. In summary, these were that this review activity had adequate resources and that the service departments contributed effectively to the review. The majority of review activity took place between October and December 2022. The comments from the relevant officer set out below do not indicate any concerns with the proposed recommendations.

6 Commentary from Education, Skills and Growth Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chair, Councillor Gill Birch

- 6.1 The review was originally in our forward plan to investigate how County Lines operate within Bracknell Forest and consider how a range of partners work together to reduce opportunities for exploitation. However, the Covid Pandemic had a huge impact on how these operate. Therefore, the review was broadened to look at Child Criminal Exploitation and looked at any changes to CCE activity
- 6.2 National evidence pointed to an increase in localised CCE activity. Safeguarding of our young people is incredibly important in this age of fast communication and social media pressures that can make them far more vulnerable to exploitation. How our council and community work in partnership is key to protecting them.
- 6.3 It was wonderful to learn how the different partners work together care so much about our young people. The case studies showed how they really make a difference to young people and their compassion and understanding of the problems that our young people face was brilliant. This review was fascinating, and all the panel members learnt a great deal about how our Community Partnership and businesses work together. Partnership working has always been a strength of Bracknell Forest Council, but I would like to say thank you to everyone who gave evidence and came to talk to us for their professionalism and dedication in keeping our young people safe. Many thanks to all the officers, police, Community and young people for their input and support.

7 Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, Sonia Johnson

- 7.1 This was a useful report and a review we were keen to participate in.

8 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 8.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. However, where personal data is being shared, it is vital to ensure the necessary data protection requirements are in place, such as a Data Protection Impact Assessment, information sharing agreement and that the Register of

Processing Activity (ROPA) is updated. Further guidance on data protection matters is available on the intranet and can be obtained from the Data Protection Officer.

Financial Advice

- 8.2 Any actions arising from the recommendations are expected to be delivered within existing budgets.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.3 The review scope, activities and recommendations were all considered in the initial equalities screening attached at Appendix B.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 8.4 There are no specific strategic risk management issues arising from the recommendations in this report.

Climate Change Implications

- 8.5 The recommendations in Section 2 and 5 above are expected to have no impact on emissions of CO2 because there is no suggested increase in activity or travel that would generate a change.

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

- 8.6 The Council is committed to improving and protecting the mental health of children and young people. These recommendations are designed to support this ongoing work by increasing awareness of CCE, including the use of cannabis on vulnerable children and the impact it can have on their wellbeing.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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