A Strategic Needs Assessment: Interim Report
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1. INTRODUCTION

As awareness of child sexual exploitation (CSE) has increased across England and Wales so too has the need to develop proactive, coordinated and intelligence-led policing responses to the issue. In 2015 the ‘International Centre: Researching child sexual exploitation, violence and trafficking’ (IC) at the University of Bedfordshire received funding to establish a CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub, to enhance police responses CSE, other forms of sexual abuse and related vulnerabilities in adolescence. The hub facilitates opportunities for the development of evidence-informed policing through relationship building and partnership working between policing and academics. To identify priorities for this programme of work, researchers from the IC have conducted a high level strategic needs assessment. This briefing details the key findings of this needs assessment exercise and recommends areas of work for the CSE and Policing Knowledge hub to prioritise over the coming year.

2. METHODOLOGY

Over the past two years a number of assessment, review and audit exercises have been conducted of local and national responses to CSE. To make best use of the evidence generated from these previous efforts, and to avoid duplicate requests to local areas, this needs assessment drew together recently published reviews/audits/inquiries and supplemented the evidence from these with regional roundtables to identify thematic needs surfaced in recent years. Appendix A details the sources featured in the review which include the notes generated from each of these regional roundtables. Once documents and notes/recommendations from the roundtables were collated they were coded and analysed using NVivo 11. Thematic headings (nodes) were primarily drawn from HMIC inspection reports, and were supplemented with additional headings that had emerged from research reports – the combination of both are listed here:

1. Multi-agency working
2. Information-sharing
3. Engagement with young people

1 A research IT software used to analyse qualitative information
4. Leadership, management and governance
5. Investigation
6. Identification
7. Assessment
8. Decision-Making
9. Organisational culture
10. Wider Response (other activities such as training and awareness raising)
11. Cross-Border (factors characterised by working across internal boundaries of police forces)
12. Profiling
13. Trusted Adult (evidence of a need for, or availability of, a trusted adult as part of the policing response to CSE)

Sub-headings (tree nodes) were then placed under each of these coding areas to identify whether the identified issue was: a need or a solution to a need; a national or local issue; related to a particular area of, or role in, policing; and whether it was related to ‘additional vulnerabilities’ associated to CSE – such as going missing, gang-affiliation and teenage relationship abuse.

This assessment drew upon information that was available to the research team at the IC. Certain inspection/audit activities were not available to the team such as the current Joint Targeted Area Inspection CSE thematic reports (yet to be completed and therefore published) or the Ending Gang and Youth Violence peer-review reports which were confidential to the sites in which they were conducted. In addition, this briefing draws upon the findings from the regional roundtables held in London, Buckinghamshire and South Yorkshire. Further roundtables that are being coordinated by regional academics are yet to be completed and have not, therefore, informed the conclusions drawn from this initial assessment exercise. It is important to acknowledge these limitations to the assessment process. Further findings of relevant reviews and forthcoming roundtables may have implications for the ways in which the IC interprets the recommendations and conclusions drawn in this document – and priorities may change in the future dependent upon additional findings.
3. FINDINGS

The analysis process identified a range of needs (under all of the headings listed above), however this briefing outlines those which appeared most prominently during the assessment exercise.

As illustrated by the text in italics in the table below, multi-agency working, information-sharing, engagement with young people, leadership, management and governance, and investigation were issues featured across most sources of the 44 sources that were analysed (including the notes generated from the needs assessment roundtables):

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<th>Parent Node</th>
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<td>1. Multi-agency working</td>
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<td>2. Information-sharing</td>
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<td>3. Engagement with young people</td>
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<td>4. Leadership, management and governance</td>
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<td>5. Investigation</td>
<td>32</td>
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<td>6. Identification</td>
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<td>7. Assessment</td>
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<td>8. Decision-Making</td>
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<td>9. Organisational culture</td>
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<td>10. Wider Response</td>
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<td>11. Cross-Border</td>
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<td>12. Profiling</td>
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<td>13. Trusted Adult</td>
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The same five were also referenced frequently within sources:

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<tr>
<th>Parent Node</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Multi-agency working</td>
<td>332</td>
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<td>2. Information-sharing</td>
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<td>3. Engagement with young people</td>
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<td>4. Leadership, management and governance</td>
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<td>5. Investigation</td>
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<td>6. Identification</td>
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<td>7. Assessment</td>
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<td>8. Decision-Making</td>
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<td>9. Organisational culture</td>
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Additionally, four consultation events have taken place with young people in order to establish the priorities for the work plan of the young people’s engagement with the CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub moving into phase 2. A number of themes identified support directly the evidence offered above with regards to the challenge of engaging with young people. These themes coalesce around the following headings:

1. Recognising vulnerability
2. Victimhood versus agency
3. Communication about the progress of investigations
4. Relationships

The intersection between this consultation with young people, regional roundtable and published documents will be outlined in the remainder of the document. Focused on the five most consistently identified needs across the evidence base – multi-agency working, information sharing, engaging young people, leadership management and governance, and investigation – this document will also consider some broader issues to which they are associated but which did not feature as prominently during the needs assessment exercise.

1. Multi-agency working

The most consistent need identified during this needs assessment process was the issue of multi-agency working. Difficulties with multi-agency working emerged as a two-way process in which the challenges of multi-agency working impeded other areas of concern such as information-sharing, assessment and investigation processes, while challenges in each of these areas impacted the effectiveness of multi-agency working. To elucidate, the challenges of working across agencies locally, regionally, across internal policing borders and nationally is impeding the ability of services to share information, work together during investigations and/or conduct shared assessments of the risk faced by young people.

Many of the challenges were identified in both local and national documents. In these instances national needs that were impinging on local multi-agency practices included:

- Tensions between multi-agency safeguarding processes and multi-agency investigations – when do investigations compromise (or risk compromising) a multi-agency safeguarding plan?
- The need for agencies to better understand their different roles, responsibilities, operating frameworks and cultural perspectives. A lack of understanding in this regard has been identified as impinging on the nurturing of trust (which in turn would facilitate information sharing) between agencies
- IT systems used across different agencies not facilitating partnership working or effective/timely information sharing
• Associated to the above point – current information sharing processes frequently being reliant on personalities and inconsistent as a result
• The need for a shared definition and understanding of risk across agencies involved in multi-agency working so that a shared outcome/vision can be pursued strategically and during the management of cases

In addition to the above, nationally focused documents identified further issues associated to multi-agency working that didn’t feature in local documents. National documents noted a need for greater consistency, and potentially guidance, associated to proactive evidence gathering using information/advice from multi-agency partners (including the use of early investigative advice from the CPS). The notification of out-of-area placements remains an issue frustrating multi-agency responses to CSE – and a number of documents recommended the need for both police forces and social work teams to be briefed when a young person (with a history of gang-association, going missing or any other vulnerability related with CSE) was placed in their geographical area of responsibility.

Local and regional documents highlighted concerns regarding the coordination of different multi-agency structures – for example coordinating the partnerships concerned with domestic abuse, gang violence, CSE and missing, given the evidenced association between the two issues:

‘Evidence suggests that boys and young men’s experiences of domestic violence at home may be associated to their episodes of going missing, their involvement in gang-related violence and/or their sexual abuse of peers/partners. However, there appears to be little coordination between the work of the MARAC in each borough and that of the local gangs’ panel’ (Firmin 2014a:10)

Other documents, including serious case reviews and area audits, identified a need for improved feedback from the police, to partners, during investigations. Investigation, as opposed to other elements of the CSE response, appears to be one of the most challenging in terms of multi-agency working. Notes from roundtable also indicated that limited (and reducing) resources nationally lessened the ability of agencies to work towards shared outcomes - instead they were each retreating back to focus on their core, and siloed, areas of business.

The need to agree whether the multi-agency response to CSE sat within, or alongside, arrangements for child protection more generally was also identified in both regional and local audits/assessments. While this is a matter that extends beyond the policing of CSE, like much of this section, a lack of clarity in this regard can impact the effectiveness of the police response to exploitation and abuse.

2. Information-sharing

Persistent difficulties associated to information sharing were arguably the greatest manifestation of the challenges of multi-agency working identified during the needs assessment. The need to improve information sharing featured 223 times across 80% (n=35) of the sources analysed for the assessment.
Both nationally and locally focused documents suggested that incompatible IT systems and agency-specific datasets hindered information sharing processes. However technological challenges aside the assessment identified organisational, cultural, structural and operational barriers to information sharing that was, in turn, impacting the quality of policing responses to CSE. Despite pockets of good practice, proactive intelligence gathering is limited and much of the policing response to CSE remains reactive. Ultimately there is a need for national agreement/leadership on two key elements of information sharing (which in turn should facilitate proactive intelligence gathering). Clarity is required on:

1. The difference between the sharing of information for the purposes of intelligence building (and potential investigations) and information sharing to inform risk assessments and, in turn, wider safeguarding decisions.
2. What information can be shared by the police with other agencies during an investigation – for the purposes of safeguarding those young people associated to a case.

While these two factors appeared the most fundamental challenges to information sharing, more detailed concerns, although less frequently referenced, also featured in the assessment process including a need for greater consistency regarding: information sharing across area boundaries; and information sharing between the police and private businesses – building on examples of promising practice that had emerged in local areas:

‘Travelodge have understood the risks that CSE poses to children and to the reputation of the company and have taken rigorous steps to ensure it does not occur on their premises… There is a Board level commitment to bar bookings relating to CSE, but better feedback from the police is required. They have concerns about data protection, but are developing a data sharing protocol with the Metropolitan Police’ (Birmingham City Council 2014:65)

Finally sharing information with the public, young people and community groups was identified as a gap in some local documents and during roundtable discussions. It is important that members of the public know what to look out for and who to contact if they have concerns about CSE. While some areas have developed poster campaigns and other activities to raise awareness locally this work is inconsistent and its impact is not always measured. Furthermore, roundtable discussions suggested a need to better communicate ‘successes’ in terms of the responding to CSE. It was suggested that if multi-agency partnerships continue to promote their work in relation to the numbers of prosecutions/arrests that are made then the public will continue to measure local responses to CSE in these terms.

3. Engagement with young people

77% of the sources (n=34) evidenced a need to improve the ways in which police forces, and specific elements of policing, engage with young people. An inability to engage with young people in general, and some sub-groups more specifically, was identified in analysed documents as creating barriers to successfully policing CSE.
Both national and local documents identified that some parts of the police service were better equipped to engage young people than others. Officers involved in neighbourhood policing were more likely to encounter, and build relationships with, young people over a prolonged period of time – although some evidence indicates that the quality of these engagements can be variable and can be a barrier if problematic. In this regard they knew who was vulnerable, where and in what circumstance and could be alert to these concerns prior to a young person being subject to a referral. However first response officers do not always have the skills to engage with, and understand, the impact of CSE – nor do they have the sustained relationships with individuals or communities that can facilitate successful engagement as those in neighbourhood policing sometimes do:

‘Good practice in specialist teams i.e. neighbourhood teams in dealing with CSE, but again difficulties in wider force. Frontline officers fail to understand the complexities of CSE and associated issues. First response teams (101) need training, particularly around missing and absent. Police teams are very good at dealing with gang related CSE’ (Buckinghamshire Roundtable, JW notes)

Specialist CSE teams have also developed skills for engaging young people directly affected by CSE, although this is not consistent across the country. Inconsistency was identified in the way that special measures were offered or Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews were conducted.

The matter of relationships appears particularly important. Police are generally called in to respond to a crisis incident or a referral – a process which arguably undermines opportunities to form long-lasting relationships, build trust and engender confidence. National sources suggested that young people struggle to trust the police – a suggestion that was reinforced by local documents. Whenever local investigations fell through, or young people were threatened into retracting statements, young people (and sometimes the professionals who work with them) perceive that the police cannot keep them safe or cannot be trusted. This can undermine future relationships and create barriers between the police and young people which in turn limit opportunities to police CSE.

Beyond policing structures and skill sets the challenge of engaging with adolescents was also noted in a number of documents. The capacity of police officers to recognise adolescent vulnerability and victimisation was noted within audits as well as serious case reviews:

‘The police contacted the CSS Out of Hours (OOH) Service who repeated the advice given by previous social workers that the parents had to take responsibility for identifying alternative accommodation if they did not want Daniel to return home. This was accepted by the Police Constable dealing with this and his comment was illuminating in terms of the unwillingness of all agencies to view Daniel as vulnerable: he stated that he had found Daniel “to be a very mature, intelligent and streetwise boy who looked older than his 13 years”’ (Kent LSCB 2013:23)

While some of this referred to broad challenges of engaging with adolescent agency, the assessment process identified particular challenges in recognising the vulnerability or young men and 16 and 17 year olds.

Recognising vulnerability and, in particular, being able to listen and consider the young person’s experience outside of previous engagement which might have been less positive
was cited by several participants who participated in the young people’s consultation. The juxtaposition of engaging with the young person as a victim and in other circumstances as a perpetrator was evidenced by young people feeling that they were constantly judged due to a number of previous experiences within the criminal justice system. For one young man, his father’s criminal history had left him feeling that he was continually being watched and that assumptions about what he was doing during his episodes of going missing meant that his vulnerabilities were ignored.

The issue of victim blaming was also cited by several participants in the young people’s consultation. For one young woman who took her complaint to the police, she described feeling blamed, not being taken seriously and that she was made to feel ‘stupid’ and, ‘it was all my own fault’. The inevitability of stereotyping and assumption-making appears to cloud the young person’s perception of how they will be treated should they make a complaint or seek support from the police, resulting in a reluctance to engage with the processes designed to support them.

4. Leadership, management and governance

190 references were made to issues related to leadership, management and governance surrounding policing responses to CSE across 77% of the sources analysed during the assessment (n=34). Despite CSA being identified as a national threat by the Government, local documents still indicate a need for greater clarity regarding the political prioritisation and place of all forms of CSE within policing agendas. Political agendas can drive policing priorities, rather than local need, having a particular influence on the attitude of leadership. Roundtables suggested that in some areas strategic decisions to prioritise and focus upon complex investigations was compromising the ability of forces to engage in early help and prevention work on the ground. In this regard, evidence suggests that senior leadership within police forces would benefit from a clearer understanding regarding the nature of CSE and the challenges faced in policing the issue – at present senior investigators don’t generally receive CSE training for example. This issue is likely to be one of many drivers for the seeming persistent gap between the strategic commitment to policing CSE and the struggle to implement this position operationally.

In addition to establishing a sustained focus on CSE, the assessment suggested a need for clarity regarding whether CSE was a specialist or core child protection issue. Inconsistent governance arrangements across the country regarding whether specialist teams or child protection teams more broadly should have oversight of this, and related vulnerabilities associated with adolescence such as gang-association, was an issue identified in both local and national documents. At a local level local area audits suggested a need to improve governance arrangements to ensure coordinated oversight of responses to domestic and sexual abuse – and associated to this the need to improve the relationship between community safety and safeguarding structures of which policing is a part.

The assessment also suggested a need for increased national oversight of particular aspects of the policing response to CSE, such as the use of behaviour orders or the need for consistent information sharing procedures across forces. The importance of governance
during investigations, such as ensuring representation from staff who were senior enough, was identified in some areas, as was the need to establish lead points of contact and decision-making during complex, multi-agency activity that may run in tandem with a police investigation.

To achieve all of the above the assessment process, particularly the roundtables, surfaced evidence of the need for a shift with policing cultures. In order to effectively respond to CSE, police forces required leadership and governance arrangements that facilitated the creation of reflective and learning organisations. Messages that emerged through consultation with young people emphasised the challenges of policing CSE in the absence of reflection, flexibility and relational working. Finally, the whole issue of respect within relationship building and recognising the see-saw of adolescent emotions was discussed by participants. One young woman cited an experience where she was threatened that unless she arrived to be interviewed at a certain time, the investigation would be dropped. This time coincided with her trial for a new part time job for which she had waited over four months. She prioritised the police interview and was obviously less cooperative than had there been the necessary flexibility to enable both to occur on the same day. Another participant wondered why the police did not recognise that her frequent bouts of anger during the return interview were the manifestation of a ‘secondary emotion’ and that had the police adopted a different approach to the process and exercised the necessary professional curiosity, the abuse she was experiencing would have been brought to a halt much earlier. Those who participated regularly drew comparisons with how it would be different for an adult victim of a crime or indeed if the police officer was themselves the victim.

Developing more reflective policing cultures is not easily accommodated within command and control structures and demands more of regular supervision, reviews of decision-making and opportunities for bottom-up, as well as top-down, problem-solving and prioritisation.

5. Investigation

While referenced across fewer sources than the aforementioned issues, needs associated to investigating CSE appeared 289 times during the analysis process. It is important to note that some of these needs were intertwined with those already discussed, for example:

- A struggle to engage young people, and in doing so build intelligence or gain disclosures, presented challenges to investigation;
- Information sharing during investigation processes created particular challenges for safeguarding young people who are being sexually exploited;
- The identified need for senior police involvement and clarity regarding governance arrangements during complex CSE investigations

With these intersections in mind, the needs assessment process identified particular issues regarding the investigation of CSE which warranted attention – the vast majority of which were national issues seemingly affecting a number of police forces across England and Wales. The assessment identified a need for further guidance, governance or legislative reform regarding different aspects of the investigation process.
Roundtable discussions acknowledged that the skills required for investigating CSE went beyond models of investigating most forms of intra-familial CSA. Forces are approaching CSE investigations differently across the country and are applying differently evidential thresholds and assessment models to understand capacity and consent of the young people involved. There is differing levels of compliance with safeguarding protocols and guidance related to CSE and sexual offences more broadly, and the cost/length of CSE investigations are creating particular pressures on decision-making and resourcing.

Challenges during the investigation process were also highlighted during consultation with young people. Communication was deemed poor by many participants who felt that the systems were not adequately explained and that there were multiple missed opportunities to gather evidence which would have helped in securing criminal convictions had the young people been listened to from the start of the investigation. An example was cited where a court case had failed because of what the judge had described as ‘confusing evidence’, and the anger of the young person having given statements and evidence in court, not addressed. Later she discovered that the tape from the ABE interview had actually been lost and therefore not offered to the court. The lengthy timeframes from complaint to court case are also not fully explained and being kept informed of the progress of the investigation is something the young people cited as crucial to their on-going engagement and cooperation with the criminal justice process. To receive a summons out of the blue, to appear and give evidence, was deemed by two young people to be extremely unhelpful and unacceptable.

Particular aspects of the investigation process are also highlighted in some sources. Guidance is required for the use of covert tactics, and the ways for including these within broader safeguarding processes. The limitations of available disruption tactics for safeguarding young people who are 16 or 17 years old when they are exploited also requires attention.

The relationship between police forces and the crown prosecution service remains in need of improvement. The ways in which unsuccessful cases are communicated to the public and to the young people involved remains inconsistent – as does the police use of early investigative advice from the crown prosecution service. According to the RASSO unit review the quality of police files that are provided to prosecutors is ‘the biggest contributory factor’ (HM CPS Inspectorate, 2016:5) to successfully proceeding with sexual offence cases.

Opportunities to advance methods in investigation appear to lie in face-to-face as opposed to e-learning techniques; but access to good quality, and multi-agency, training remains patchy. Co-location has been identified by some studies to provide one route for improving partnership working, information sharing and coordination during investigations, but debates regarding the involvement of specialist CSE vs. generic child abuse teams persist within local reports/audits.

4. GAPS IN RESEARCH

In addition to identifying ways in which policing responses to CSE could be improved, the roundtables that were held during this assessment period also considered gaps in research. Analysis of these discussions, coupled with the above needs assessment, suggests that
many of the research gaps seem to be directly related to the areas of policing that require most improvement.

A need to identify successful models of multi-agency working was the most consistently identified gap in research. Roundtable participants requested further evidence on: models of managing connected/associated cases of CSE; information sharing; holding risk within multi-agency partnerships; and the value (or lack thereof) of co-located teams.

The assessment process (including roundtables) also identified a gap in knowledge regarding the perpetration of CSE. While not explicitly related to any of the identified needs, a limited understand of the drivers, motivations and models of perpetration has an impact upon the ability of the police to successfully investigate the issue. Roundtable participants didn’t appear to simply want more research into ‘perpetrators’. Discussions surfaced a need for research to aid the identification and de-escalation of perpetration. In particular, manifestations of CSE which appeared to present additional challenges for investigations and multi-agency working were identified as priorities for research. ‘Female facilitators’ of abuse, peer-on-peer exploitation, group-based harmful sexual behaviour amongst young people and online exploitation involving social media were all identified as areas where practitioners required more knowledge.

Associated to the above point, but albeit less consistently, roundtable participants called for further research into sub-groups of young people who may be sexually exploited. Boys and young men, young people with disabilities and young people without any explicit ‘vulnerabilities’ were all identified as cohorts of young people whose experiences were least understood by practitioners. This finding is important as it appears to directly relate to some of the challenges of engaging young people who are affected by CSE identified during the needs assessment.

Research into investigation processes were also recommended during roundtable discussions. Participants called for evidence regarding: the success rates of different approaches to investigating CSE; the timescales, and associated challenges, of investigations; and the identification of trends across cases which don’t proceed to charge.

A number of other research gaps, while not referenced as consistently, were identified during roundtables – many of which related to broader issues regarding safeguarding young people affected by CSE rather than being exclusively related to policing responses. These included:

- Evidence regarding early intervention, education and resilience
- Child protection policies and procedures and their appropriateness for CSE cases
- The success/challenges of public –space interventions
- The success/challenges of relocation
- Prevalence
- Risk assessment tools
- The use of missing and absent categories
- Support for families
- Wider community engagement in responses to CSE
5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this high-level assessment indicate that the Policing and CSE Knowledge hub should focus its efforts on addressing the following needs:

1. **Effective multi-agency strategic oversight and case management.** Work should focus on addressing the place of investigations (and their multi-agency nature) as part of wider multi-agency safeguarding responses. Within this opportunities are required for the police partners to better understand the roles, responsibilities and cultures of partner organisations. Activities in this area should contribute towards shared assessments of risk which compliment, but are not conflated with, thresholds for investigation.

2. **Evidencing pathways and processes for consistent information-sharing.** Activities in this area need to have a particular focus on information sharing during investigations and communicating distinctions between information sharing for assessment processes and intelligence gathering for the purposes of investigation.

3. **Improving the ways in which the police engage with young people:** Elements of this could be achieved through focused work on ABE interviews, the communication of no-further-action decisions or other specific aspects of the criminal justice process. However broader issues such as the ways in which agencies view vulnerable adolescents, the way that young people and other multi-agency partners view policing and opportunities for relationship building within policing structures (such as neighbourhood policing) also warrant attention.

4. **Identifying and creating opportunities for holistic governance structures within the policing of CSE** which: incorporate attention to vulnerabilities related to CSE; provide routes for reflection (even within a command and control structure); and offer guidance with specific elements of policing that require greater consistency such as the use of behaviour orders.

5. **Developing evidence on models of CSE investigation** – including the components of different approaches and the related outcomes. Arguably needs related to investigations will be addressed via the four other needs already outlined: improved multi-agency working, increased identification, better engagement with young people and holistic governance structures should all facilitate improvements in investigation.
Appendix A – Needs Assessment Sources

5. Briefing note CC Bailey re Benchmarking strategic issues 151215 (1)
7. City and County of Cardiff (2011). Publication of Three Serious Case Reviews Summaries by Cardiff Local Safeguarding Children Board. Cardiff, Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
17. HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (2016) Thematic Review of the CPS Rape and Serious Sexual Offences Units. London, HMCPSI
22. Notes from CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub Sheffield (BR)
23. Notes from CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub Buckinghamshire (JW)
24. Notes from CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub Sheffield (JW)
25. Notes from CSE coordinator and analyst-led roundtables: London
26. Notes from CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub Buckinghamshire (CF)
27. Notes from CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub Sheffield (CF)
28. Notes from CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub Buckinghamshire (DA)
29. Notes from CSE and Policing Knowledge Hub London
30. RSCB (2013) The Overview Report of the Serious Case Review in respect of Young People 1,2,3,4,5 & 6 Rochdale, Safeguarding Children Board
31. RSCB (2013) The Overview Report of the Serious Case Review in respect of Young People 1,2,3,4,5 & 6 Rochdale, Safeguarding Children Board
Person 7 Rochdale, Safeguarding Children Board

Additionally, the following sources were considered in the development of this briefing:

- A summary of the findings related to policing CSE in UoB research reports
- Analysis of 12 x HMIC Child Protection Inspection Reports (included in overall count to 44 documents)