New report on child sexual exploitation should be a ‘wake up call,’ says The Children’s Society

Tuesday 17 February, 2015

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Commenting on the Office of the Children's Commissioner's report published on 17 February 2015 which found that authorities are 'failing to live up to the realities of child sexual exploitation', Peter Grigg, Director of Campaigns and Policy, at The Children's Society, which helps young people who experience or are at risk of child sexual exploitation, says:

"This new report should serve as yet another wake-up call for police, social services and all those responsible for protecting children from sexual predators. It sends a clear message that the time has come to move from plans to real actions to protect children and young people from this horrible crime.

"It is shocking that after so many reports, court cases and inquiries on child sex abuse there are still areas of the country where the authorities have no idea how many victims there are.

"We have to stop relying solely on children coming forward to report abuse and sexual exploitation. Professionals working with children - the police, teachers, social services and health staff - should pay careful attention to the signs of child sexual exploitation and communicate with each other about it. They need to listen to children and young people and act with urgency to keep them safe.

"Councils, the police, social services and others working with vulnerable children cannot effectively protect them until they understand the true scale of the problem. We urge them to share information and for the government to set guidance on doing this.

"It is not enough to protect those at risk. We need to prevent this horrible crime happening by empowering children and young people with knowledge. Schools should be legally obliged to educate children about relationships and sex, particularly on the signs of grooming and issues like consent, violence and what constitutes a healthy relationship.

"The government must also make sure that the police have all the tools they need to disrupt sexual exploitation. We are calling on it to extend the use of Child Abduction Warning Notices to vulnerable young people aged 16-17 who are too often targeted for sexual exploitation by predatory individuals. This is a crucial change needed and one that has been called for by the police."

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For copies of the report or the press release from the Office of the Children's Commissioner

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Notes to Editors:

1. The Office of the Children's Commissioner, 'If it's not better, it's not the end": Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups: One year on, 17 February 2015

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