

# Fighting child sexual exploitation, keeping vulnerable people safe, and caring for victims in Rochdale

Newsletter

January 2024

## Preventing and reducing CSE, and keeping vulnerable young people safe

Since the early 2000s, Greater Manchester Police and Rochdale Council have revolutionised the prevention of and response to child sexual exploitation to ensure that vulnerable young people are cared for and receive the expected level of service. Whilst criminal justice outcomes are one aim of investigations and operations, through the Complex Safeguarding Hub also known as The Sunrise Team which co-locates police with local authority and health service colleagues in Rochdale Police Station, the partnership has refined the focus on the safeguarding of vulnerable young people and the prevention and reduction of exploitation. The team also runs proactive operations to educate communities, identify potential victims and offenders, and close gateways to child sexual exploitation.

“In recent years, we have taken strides on our journey to improve our response to child sexual exploitation. Whilst colleagues investigate crimes to ensure survivors are properly cared for and suspects are relentlessly pursued, The Sunrise Team run a number of proactive alternatives specifically to prevent vulnerable young people from becoming victims in the first place.

“Our journey, so far, has seen us put a real focus on effective partnership working between GMP and colleagues from the local authority and health services. By co-locating key individuals within our Complex Safeguarding Hub, we have developed a proper understanding of how each agency can contribute to the fight and ensure they are well positioned to use their powers to yield positive results.

“Whilst there will always be offenders who seek to exploit vulnerable young people - either criminally or sexually, this approach is ensuring we identify those involved at the earliest possible opportunity. We’re also committed to helping others spot the signs and utilise our reporting mechanisms. As such, we have a team who deliver inputs to children, staff, and parents at local schools and to the businesses in our communities which are most likely to have intelligence about this abhorrent type of crime.”

**Detective Chief Inspector Stuart Round**  
Rochdale district

## CASE STUDY: Operation Cobalt

Under Operation Cobalt, the team visits hotels and taxi companies to educate staff on the signs of child sexual exploitation and how to report concerns to GMP or Rochdale Council. In 2023, the team partnered with Trading Standards to complete test purchases and are currently in the process of developing an input which can be delivered to those in public-facing roles.



## CASE STUDY: Operation Vigilant

Under Operation Vigilant, the team responds to intelligence gathered from key sources within communities to identify potential victims and offenders to enable early intervention. In 2023, the team conducted seven days of action resulting in the seizure of 4,733 illegal vapes – which intelligence suggests are sometimes being used to groom vulnerable young people.



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## Investigating and solving multi-victim, multi-offender CSE

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The partnership is supported by the force's Child Sexual Exploitation Major Investigation Team (formerly the Force CSE Unit). Established in 2021 to investigate the most serious and complex cases, CSE MIT is made up of 107 police officers and staff who are specially trained to work with partner agencies to conduct victim-centred, suspect-focussed, and evidence-based investigations. The force's governance framework ensure that practice is reflective of that which is recognised as 'best' by peers following reviews by the Independent Office for Police Conduct and The Hydrant Programme, and support services with which we partner including the National Association for People Abused in Childhood, St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Manchester Rape Crisis, and We Are Survivors. **Since nine men were convicted following the conclusion of Operation Span in 2012, 135 arrests, 432 charges, and 33 convictions in relation to investigations into non-recent multi-victim multi-offender CSE in Rochdale.**



Additional investigations led by both the district and CSE MIT are ongoing.

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### CASE STUDY: Operation Lytton

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Operation Lytton was launched in 2015, to investigate offending against victims whose cases were investigated but not progressed by Operation Span. To date, five men have been convicted of 22 offences against two victims between 2002 and 2006. An additional 29 suspects are scheduled to go on trial in 2025.

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### Caring for victims and survivors

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Greater Manchester Police and Rochdale Council have put a renewed focus on caring for victims and delivering the expected level of service to survivors – ensuring that they are the centre of investigations, that they are supported by specialist services, and that they feel empowered to testify against those who have harmed them.

Whilst criminal justice outcomes are one objective of investigations, the overarching aim of operations like Lytton is to ensure victims and survivors are offered the support they want or need; to help them make informed decisions about their next steps; and to take those steps when they feel they are ready to do so.

“Victim care is absolutely critical to non-recent CSE investigations. We put victims at the very centre of our investigations, and putting the right support around them and going at their own pace is absolutely vital to the success of these investigations and their feelings about the level of service they are receiving. Both ourselves and support services tailor our approach and care plans around survivors so that they can come forward in their own time – whenever they are ready, we will be there to listen.

“These are very complicated matters and they can take quite a long time to get to court but we will be with the victim from the start of that journey right until the very end and beyond. Whilst judicial outcomes are really important – it's always great to see people being put behind bars for a long time, the key thing, the most important thing, for me and the investigation is to see justice for survivors.”

**Detective Chief Inspector Guy Laycock**  
CSE MIT

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### Signs of Child Sexual Exploitation

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- Unhealthy or inappropriate sexual behaviour
- Being frightened of some people, places or situations.
- Being secretive
- Sharp changes in mood or character
- Having money or things they can't or won't explain
- Physical signs of abuse, like bruises or bleeding in their genital or anal area
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Sexually transmitted infections.
- Pregnancy
- Having an older boyfriend or girlfriend
- Staying out late or overnight
- Having a new group of friends
- Missing from home or care, or stopping going to school or college
- Hanging out with older people, other vulnerable people or in antisocial groups
- Involved in a gang
- Involved in criminal activities like selling drugs or shoplifting.

Greater Manchester Police can be contacted via **[gmp.police.uk](https://www.gmp.police.uk)** or **101**. In an emergency, always dial **999**. Concerns can also be reported to Rochdale Council via **0300 303 0440**.

Specialist support is available via:  
**St Mary's Sexual Assault Referral Centre**  
0161 276 6515 / [stmaryscentre.org](https://stmaryscentre.org)  
**Manchester Rape Crisis**  
0161 273 4500 / [manchesterrapecrisis.co.uk](https://manchesterrapecrisis.co.uk)  
**We Are Survivors**  
0808 500 2222 / [wearesurvivors.org.uk](https://wearesurvivors.org.uk)