

Exploitation Strategy 2019-2021

Report of the Head of Children's Social Care (Deputy Chief Officer)

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

The purpose of this paper is to;

Brief members on the agreed Exploitation Strategy for Children 2018-21. This strategy was agreed by the Safer Devon Partnership in November 2018 and the Devon Children and Family Partnership in December 2018. The Strategy is attached as [Appendix 1](#).

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The previous child sexual exploitation (CSE) strategy had been agreed in 2015-18 by the then Local Safeguarding Children Board. The South West CSE Peninsula Group in July 18 agreed that 'exploitation' needed to be considered more widely. The strategy needed to address the challenges posed by economic, criminal and sexual exploitation.
- 1.2 Over the last year there had been increasing evidence provided by Devon and Cornwall Police that Devon was being targeted by criminals in larger cities such as London and Liverpool to distribute drugs within Devon. County lines sometimes also referred to as Dangerous Drug Networks (DDN's) is the term for urban gangs supplying drugs into our towns and villages through child criminal exploitation (CCE). This is the use of children from the urban source area or the targeting of local children and vulnerable adults to move both drugs and money. Gangs having established a market base can typically take over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force, coercion and or deception in a term referred to as 'cuckooing'.
- 1.3 A multi -agency group "The County Lines Strategic Forum" was set up with representatives across all partners to ensure a cohesive response to this threat. Protocols were put in place to ensure children found subject to this exploitation were viewed as victims and protected. Disruption activity was undertaken by the police with a multi -agency response to ensure that Devon was a 'hostile environment' for this form of activity. This swift multi agency work has been viewed by the Government as innovative and is being copied by other Local Authorities across Britain. We were also successful in gaining innovation funding through central government funding to undertake a project in Exeter and a project in South Devon with a joint response from both Torbay Council and Devon County Council with the Safer Partnerships in both authorities to target the challenge of gang activity in South Devon.

1.4 Work already undertaken includes:

- Guidance written and cascaded across all partner agencies
- Leaflets and training provided for train the trainers
- Partner Agency Intelligence Form devised, cascaded to agencies and within wider communities such as hotels, taxi firms and other groups to ensure wider understanding
- Protocol agreed and implemented between Devon and Cornwall Police to ensure any child suspected of being involved in County Lines to be treated as vulnerable and a victim.
- Targeted disruption by Devon and Cornwall starting in Exeter and other hotspots across Devon. There are trusted relationships which have enabled a joint response with Adult and Childrens services including the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) being notified prior to the operations ensuring accommodation and services are available to support victims.
- Tracking and understanding of our cohort.
- Guidance updated to ensure clear process for the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)
- All children under 18 are escorted back to their home Local authority or family given accommodation overnight to collect them.
- Agreement with Courts to ensure any bail conditions are supportive to the family and do not cause hardship and promote re- integration to the family

2. Exploitation Strategy

- 2.1 A Devon Strategy was needed to ensure all forms of exploitation were considered. This was jointly devised by the Devon Children and Families partnership (DCFP) and the Safer Devon Partnership (SDP) to ensure a joint response as child sexual, criminal and economic exploitation is rarely a solitary issue, concerns are often multi-faceted and interrelated. These types of abuse are extremely complex and often hidden. They occur when children and young people misplace their trust in peers and/or adults who exercise coercion over them through grooming, intimidation, debt bondage and violence for their own gains. The indicators for exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for 'normal adolescent behaviours'. It requires professionals and the community to gain awareness, knowledge and exercise 'curiosity' to identify the abuse. Children and young people may not recognise the harm they are experiencing and may also be very reluctant to talk and as such all agencies, professionals and the wider community need to be alert to the signs of exploitation and be able to effectively respond.
- 2.2. The scope of this strategy crosses the domains of child sexual exploitation, missing children, gangs, modern slavery and the Prevent Strategy and criminal exploitation as the Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP) and the Safer Devon Partnership (SDP) recognises that a broader view of safeguarding is required when considering exploitation of children and young people. The DCFP and SDP views exploitation on a continuum that is a consequence of grooming from either within or outside the young person's home by peers or adults. All forms of exploitation for either criminal or sexual gains are equally as abusive and destructive to a young person's outcomes.

- 2.3. This form of safeguarding promotes the idea that young people's behaviour, levels of vulnerability and resilience are informed by the social, public as well as the private contexts in which young people spend their time. As young people grow they spend increasing amounts of time with their peers independent of carer/parent supervision. During this period of exploration children and young people may be exposed to harmful situations or be vulnerable to abusive and exploitative relationships. To protect them a joint community and professional response is needed to identify the risks. Interventions need to include all the social environments where the exploitation and abuse occurs.
- 2.4. For our strategic preventative and protective efforts to be both purposeful and effective, the strategy recommends that we develop and embed a shared understanding of the problem and the environments and contexts in which exploitation occurs so we can identify wider patterns of concern and intervene to protect victims (or potential victims) and disrupt perpetrators of abuse swiftly and affectively. The format to implement the wider strategy is based upon the 4 P's used widely by police forces across the Country. The use of Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue with expectations set out for each part. This enables a joint conversation with shared understanding.

3.0 Next steps

- 3.1. Exploitation web site across the Safer Devon Partnership and Devon Children and Family Partnership websites has been built and is currently being tested. This will inform all professionals and the wider public about exploitation, the different types and what everyone can do. It will go live in February 2019.
- 3.2 Implementation of the changes needed to the Multi Agency Child Sexual Exploitation groups (MACSE) to Multi Agency Exploitation (MACE) Groups across Devon also to be implemented in February 2019.

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Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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Appendix 1 : Exploitation of Children Strategy 2018-2021

Description

This scope of this strategy crosses the domains of child sexual exploitation, missing children, gangs, county lines, modern slavery and all forms of criminal exploitation. The safeguarding of children and young people from the psychological and physical harm caused by exploitation is a core priority for the Devon Children and Family Partnership (DCFP) and Safer Devon Partnership (SDP). They recognise that a broader view of safeguarding and response is required when considering the exploitation of children and young people.

Introduction

Child sexual, criminal and economic exploitation is rarely a solitary issue, concerns are often multi-faceted and interrelated. These types of abuse are extremely complex and often hidden, they occur when children and young people misplace their trust in peers and/or adults who exercise coercion over them through grooming, intimidation, debt bondage and violence for their own gains. The indicators for exploitation can sometimes be mistaken for 'normal adolescent behaviours'. It requires professionals and the community to gain awareness, knowledge and exercise 'curiosity' to identify the abuse. Children and young people may not recognise the harm they are experiencing and may also be very reluctant to talk and as such all agencies, professionals and the wider community need to be alert to the signs of exploitation and be able to effectively respond.

The Devon and Cornwall Police Serious and Organised Crime Local Profile on Child Sexual Exploitation (2016-17), the Strategic Profile for Youth Gangs (2017-18) and the Devon Strategic Assessment 2018 (<https://new.devon.gov.uk/emergencies/files/2018/11/Devon-Strategic-Assessment-2017-18.pdf>) advised that a 'contextualising framework' for safeguarding is needed to address the increasing numbers of young people 'at risk' of and in some cases 'perpetrators' of exploitation. This form of safeguarding promotes the idea that young people's behaviour, levels of vulnerability and resilience are informed by the **social, public** as well as the **private** contexts in which young people spend their time. As young people grow they spend increasing amounts of time with their peers independent of carer/parent supervision. During this period of exploration children and young people may be exposed to harmful situations or be vulnerable to abusive and exploitative relationships. To protect them a joint community and professional response is needed to identify the risks. Interventions need to include all the social environments where the exploitation and abuse occurs.

More is now known about further forms of exploitation including the threat of young people being exploited by dangerous drugs networks also known as County Lines. The Safer Devon Partnership has identified with Devon and Cornwall Police via the County Lines Serious Organised Crime Local Profile 2017 that initially young people aged 15-17 who live outside the area were being exploited. This is reflected in the fact that we have seen an increase in the number of modern slavery National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals that involve young people who have been trafficked into Devon to sell drugs. However, in the last 12 months there is an increased risk of local children being targeted and becoming involved. Children who are looked after and those involved with the Youth Offending Teams have an increased vulnerability to exploitation. Children are being targeted and exploited and should be viewed as victims, at risk and in need of protection.

In Devon, there is growing evidence of the strong links between exploitation, missing, drugs, gangs and youth violence. Our approach to tackling the problem must be collaborative, inclusive and multiagency, supported by purposeful leadership across the Partnerships. We need to ensure that through collective efforts we work together to protect children.

Types of exploitation

Child exploitation is the act of using a child or young person for profit, labour, sexual gratification (virtual or in person), or some other personal or financial advantage. Child exploitation often results in cruel or harmful treatment of the child, as the activities he or she may be forced to take part in can cause trauma, emotional, physical, and social problems.

Sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a form of sexual abuse. Children and young people in exploitative situations and relationships receive something such as gifts, money or affection because of performing sexual activities or others performing sexual activities on them.

Some children and young people are trafficked into or within the UK for sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation can also happen to young people in gangs. Child sexual exploitation is a hidden crime. Young people often trust their abuser and don't understand that they're being abused. They may depend on their abuser or be too scared to tell anyone what's happening.

It can involve violent, humiliating and degrading sexual assaults, including oral and anal rape. In some cases, young people are persuaded or forced into exchanging sexual activity for money, drugs, gifts, affection or status. Child sexual exploitation doesn't always involve physical contact and can happen online. Children and young people can be groomed online or in the real world, by a stranger or by someone they know - a family member, friend or professional. The law states that consent is only valid where a young person can make a choice and have the freedom and capacity to make that choice. If a child feels they have no other meaningful choice, are under the influence of harmful substances or are fearful of what might happen if they don't comply (all of which are common features in child exploitation) consent cannot legally be given whatever the age of the child.

Criminal exploitation, County Lines and Gangs

County lines, sometimes referred to as Dangerous Drug Networks (DDN's) is the police term for urban gangs supplying drugs into our local market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone numbers, often referred to as 'graft phones' or 'deal lines'. It can often involve child criminal exploitation (CCE) using children from the urban source area or the targeting of local children and vulnerable adults to move both drugs and money. Gangs having established a market base can typically take over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force, coercion and or deception in a term referred to as 'cuckooing'.

Gangs can typically recruit and exploit children and young people to courier drugs and cash either within their area or to another location across the Country. Gangs recruit through deception, intimidation, violence, debt bondage and/or grooming. Sexual exploitation is also used in gangs to:

- exert power and control over members

- initiate young people into the gang
- exchange sexual activity for status or protection
- entrap rival gang members by exploiting girls and young women
- inflict sexual assault as a weapon in conflict.

Girls and young women are frequently forced into sexual activity by gang members. Research by [Beckett \(2012\)](#) found girls considered to be engaging in casual sex were seen as forfeiting their right to refuse sex. The 2016 runaway and Missing children and Adults, all Party Parliamentary Group Report found that “patterns of grooming children for criminal exploitation are very similar to sexual exploitation. In the past CSE was often perceived amongst professional’s as the young person’s fault, or due to risky behaviour. We believe that in some areas of the UK a similar culture currently exists around criminal exploitation by gangs”. The majority of sexual exploitation within gangs is committed by teenage boys and men in their twenties ([Borowitz et al, 2012](#)).

Trafficking and Modern Slavery

Child trafficking and modern slavery are child abuse. Children are recruited, moved or transported and then exploited, forced to work or sold.

Children are trafficked for:

- child sexual exploitation
- benefit fraud
- forced marriage
- domestic servitude such as cleaning, childcare, cooking
- forced labour in factories or agriculture
- criminal activity such as pickpocketing, begging, transporting drugs, working on cannabis farms, selling pirated DVDs and bag theft.

Many children are trafficked into the UK from abroad, but children can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another

Radicalisation/Prevent

The Government recently launched a new counter terrorism strategy ([CONTEST](#)). PREVENT is one of the four strands of the strategy. The purpose of PREVENT is, at its heart, to safeguard and support vulnerable people to stop them from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Individuals who are risk of being radicalised or who are believed to be in the process of being radicalised, including children and young people, should be referred into PREVENT so that partners can assess the risk and, if deemed appropriate, formulate a plan to stop the individual becoming further drawn towards terrorism or supporting violent extremist activity.

While no single factor will cause someone to become radicalised, several factors can converge to create the conditions under which radicalisation can occur. These factors include background, aspects of someone’s personal circumstances, which might make them vulnerable to exploitative individuals and /or organisations. They may be influenced by, peoples, ideas or experiences that influence an individual towards supporting extremism/a terrorist movement; and an ideological opening, or receptiveness to extremist ideology. They may be struggling with a sense of identity, are distanced from their cultural or religious

background, questioning their place in society, may have suffered a traumatic event, have difficulty in interacting socially, lacking empathy. Most individuals experiencing this combination of factors will not go on to become involved in terrorism because there are protective factors that prevent them from doing so. These range from having no opportunity to develop extremist contacts, to having other more important priorities in their lives (such as a family or community involvement). A small number of people who lack these protective factors may become radicalised. In these circumstances, a range of social and ideological influences can combine to intensify commitment to a terrorist cause and provide opportunities for them to act.

Outline of strategy

This document provides the strategic pathway to ensure all strands of exploitation are brought together to ensure greater understanding and collective response.

Any strategic approach needs to be in line with national and local policies. All activities and services referenced in this document must be underpinned by a robust evidence base for practice.

Purpose and Aims

Exploitation of Children and Young People is located within a wider context of risk and harm. For our strategic preventative and protective efforts to be both purposeful and effective, we must develop and embed a shared understanding of the problem and the environments and contexts in which exploitation occurs, so we can identify wider patterns of concern and intervene to protect victims (or potential victims) and disrupt perpetrators of abuse swiftly and affectively. The scope of this strategy crosses the domains of child sexual exploitation, missing children, gangs and criminal exploitation as the Devon children and Families Partnership (DCFP) and the Safer Devon Partnership (SDP) recognises that a broader view of safeguarding is required when considering exploitation of children and young people. The DCFP and SDP views exploitation on a continuum that is a consequence of grooming from either within or outside the young person's home by peers or adults. All forms of exploitation for either criminal or sexual gains are equally as abusive and destructive to a young person's outcomes.

This strategy should be read alongside the:

- Adolescent Safety Pathway - operation document (under development)
- CSE - Peninsula Strategy
- Substance Misuse Strategy
- Trafficking and Modern Slavery Strategy (under development)
- Youth Justice Strategy
- Safer Devon Partnership's Community Safety Agreement and the 2018 Strategic Assessment of Crime and Disorder (Threat, Risk and Harm) in Devon
- Youth Homelessness Protocol
- Corporate Parenting Strategy
- Missing Children Policy and Procedures

The aims of this strategy will be overseen by the Complex Safeguarding Group which reports to the DCFP (which includes SDP and Devon Safeguarding Adults Board representation).

The following model provides a structure on which to base operational activities:



Prepare

All Local Leaders and Partners across Devon have a responsibility to safeguard children from harm. They have a shared responsibility to understand the problem, have an agreed and coordinated approach to tackle it and an uncompromising tenacity and ambition to ensure that a zero-tolerance culture is developed that allows no child or young person to be exploited within our communities. That each organisation highlights the issue of child exploitation and informs its employees and other partners on how to identify a child at risk and pathways to ensure information is shared.

We must exercise and model positive and proactive curiosity about what life is like for children and young people in Devon, provide challenge to systems and practices that exclude and blame vulnerable children and young people and appropriately challenge harmful and exploitative situations.

Prevent

- The safety of children and young people is prioritised across the partnerships including partner agencies, political and community leaders and that this is reflected and owned within their respective strategic ambitions.
- Individuals living and working in Devon from businesses, professional and nonprofessional backgrounds, grassroots organisations, the voluntary sector, community and faith groups are effectively engaged and know what to do if they are worried about a child or young person. Schools and colleges will recognise grooming behaviours, understand the nature of consent and be able to evidence preventive measures.
- Risks to children and young people are considered in the systems and context in which they live, learn and grow and which recognise the valuable contributions of their families, schools, neighbourhoods and communities make towards achieving successful outcomes.
- All agencies understand the responsibility and pathways for information sharing under [Working Together 2018](#). That multi-agency information and intelligence is gathered and shared to identify early, those children and young people at the greatest risk of exploitation.
- That all agencies mobilise early help multi-agency intervention, targeted at children at risk of experiencing adversity arising from exposure to familial violence, poverty, parental mental health or substance misuse or from being excluded from school
- Multi Agency information and intelligence is gathered to identify risks and vulnerabilities in groups, communities and individuals
- Early help is effective in building resilience and preventing vulnerabilities from escalating into social or educational exclusion, neglect and abuse. We will do this through 'working together within localities, towns and communities to support children who need support'.
- A universal approach to building resilience of children and young people is promoted through services such as childrens centres, and the SDP funded initiative that aims to

support the development of confident and skilled professionals in effectively delivering personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and 'relationships and sex education' (RSE). In addition to this there is a desire by the Emotional Health Workstream of the Sustainability Transformation Plan (STP) to test a whole school approach to promoting resilience in children and young people. A [Resilience Framework](#) is being considered, amongst other approaches, that focuses on five aspects; basic necessities, belonging, coping, learning and core self (Hart & Blincow, 2007).

- Trusting relationships are built between partners and with families and children to hold and support risk, provide training and build awareness about how children and young people can keep themselves safe online, in their homes, schools and communities.
- The need for statutory youth offending and or safeguarding interventions is reduced
- Families feel supported and informed about risks and know how to access support.
- The DCFP partnership is to ensure professionals have a good understanding of normal adolescent behaviours and the concept of 'consent
- The use of technology is recognised as potential platforms from which exploitation can occur and present opportunities to understand the early indicators of local issues and tensions.

Protect

To identify and protect children and young people who are being coerced or exploited to engage in harmful and illegal behaviour and our shared ambition to provide rapid and effective protective multi agency response and support to the child, family community and community. Thereby ensuring that children and young people are kept safe with partnerships that wrap around vulnerability to protect them from harm.

All agencies and professionals co-operate and collaborate to build a clear and accurate picture of a child or young person's circumstances and who can be involved to provide protection.

Outcomes

- Multi agency information and intelligence is gathered and shared to identify children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation, to map hotspots, trends and risks in missing episodes, victim and perpetrator identification and criminal activity involving children including County Lines
- Professionals across DCFP and the SDP have relevant and proportionate knowledge of risk and vulnerability factors as they relate to the exploitation of vulnerable adolescents.
- That professionals take part in the addressing these challenges where possible in the early help, child in need arena to ensure support is at the earliest point and/ or (Vulnerable Risk Meetings tbc).
- A non-pathologizing culture is developed in which exploited children and young people are always recognised and supported as victims
- There is a common understanding and language of exploitation and its impact on victims and their families

- Multi- Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Panels will ensure that the risks and needs in an area can be identified at the earliest point and measures put in place to protect vulnerable families and children.

Pursue

Victims must be assured that all partners are working together to safeguard them through robust enforcement activity. Young people should be protected within their own community and that moving the child victim out of the home or to 'placements' at distance is minimised and only used in very exceptional circumstances.

- All legal options will be considered to ensure the exploitation is disrupted and a child or young person is safe from the perpetrator
- Agencies flexibly apply the full range of disruption tactics available through the criminal and civil routes to protect children and young people including but not exclusive to:
 - Child abduction Notices
 - Sexual Risk Orders
 - Sexual Harm Prevention Order
 - National Referral Mechanism
- Information is shared to assist with prosecutions and in relation to highlighted locations, perpetrators or suspected perpetrators within communities, school networks and other relevant organisations