

Cumbria Safeguarding  
Children Partnership



**Cumbria's  
Child Exploitation  
Strategy  
2021-24**



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## Foreword

As lead partners of Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP) we are pleased to present our new Child Exploitation Strategy. Protecting children from child exploitation, has been and continues to be a priority for our safeguarding partnership.

Child Exploitation is a form of child abuse that impacts on the lives of children, their families and the communities of Cumbria.

This strategy builds upon the work already in place across Cumbria. All agencies across Cumbria are fully committed to safeguarding children from all forms of exploitation along with disrupting and prosecuting the individuals who have exploited them.

As a partnership we will ensure that the right resources are well trained, skilled and in place to drive the activity outlined within the document.

Most importantly, we will listen to children, families and communities to understand how we can support them, prevent child exploitation in our communities, equip them with the knowledge about how to identify and report exploitation and know what services there are to meet their needs.



## What is child exploitation?

Child exploitation, is a form of child abuse. Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child (under the age of 18 years):

- a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants and/or
- b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator.

Child exploitation takes many forms, including sexual, physical and emotional abuse, neglect, exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups, trafficking, online grooming and abuse, online exploitation and intimidation, sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

These types of abuse are complex and often hidden. Many young people don't recognise they are being exploited or that they are at risk of harm. Children experiencing exploitation might be reluctant to talk about what is happening to them.

Any child can be exploited, however professionals need to be mindful that research has identified certain factors that may make them more vulnerable. These include:

- having prior experience of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse;
- lack of a safe/stable home environment, now or in the past;
- social isolation or social difficulties;
- economic vulnerability;
- homelessness or insecure accommodation status;
- connections with other people involved in gangs;
- having a physical or learning disability;
- having mental health or substance misuse issues;
- being in care (particularly those in residential care and those with interrupted care histories);
- being excluded from mainstream education.

Due to the cycle and pattern of exploitation, protecting children from exploitation requires people from all organisations and communities to work collaboratively, to build trust with young people, minimise the risk by focussing on the perpetrators of abuse and to ensure our communities are spaces where children can thrive and feel safe.

It is our collective responsibility to identify those children and young people at risk of exploitation and our joint responsibility to protect and safeguard them from further risk of harm. It is also our joint responsibility to prevent children becoming victims of this form of abuse and reduce the opportunities that offenders may have to exploit children in the future.

## Overview

This is Cumbria's Multi Agency Child Exploitation Strategy. Its purpose is to create an overarching strategy across Cumbria, to ensure an effective and coordinated response to children and young people at risk of or linked to exploitation. This will enable partners to identify potential vulnerabilities at the earliest opportunity and take steps to reduce threat, risk and harm. This strategy responds to and works to deliver on our statutory duties set out in national guidance in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), with the voice of the child at the centre.

This strategy recognises that children and young people can be at risk of or subjected to harm through exploitation and abuse from adults and/or other peers outside of their family network. Tackling the risks posed by child exploitation requires a contextual safeguarding approach to understanding and responding to young peoples' experiences of significant harm beyond their families.

Traditionally, safeguarding services were developed and structured to address familial risk. Young people's needs and experiences are very different as they get older. Risks outside the home or family (extra familial risks) become more relevant. These are sometimes referred to as 'contextual' risks. Understanding contexts relevant to the daily lived experience of our children and young people is key to reducing risk and improving outcomes.

There are several different forms of Child Exploitation, this strategy aims to build on existing structures in place across Cumbria to bring together expertise, knowledge and skills to deliver services in a co-ordinated way across the following strands of exploitation:

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
- County Lines
- Children who go missing
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)
- Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking
- Online Child Exploitation
- Wider Contextual Safeguarding

It is of note that this list is not exhaustive, and that the strategy will evolve over time to address the changing dynamics of exploitation and address future and emerging threats and risks.

We recognise the safeguarding parallels between child exploitation and radicalisation. We are cognisant of the pre-existing Cumbria Community Safety Partnership Prevent Strategy & Delivery Plan, which seeks to address vulnerability to radicalisation in children and young people as well as in adults. Wherever possible, we will seek to support the Prevent Strategy & Delivery Plan, coordinate our messaging and training, promote awareness of the Channel Panel process and encourage appropriate referrals.

Exploitation doesn't stop when a young person turns 18. We acknowledge the need to ensure that there is an informed and co-ordinated response, which spans the needs of all people in Cumbria regardless of age. There is a strong commitment from the CSCP and agencies to improve knowledge, services for adults at risk of exploitation and ensure offenders are brought to justice.

## Vision

Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership's vision for our Child Exploitation Strategy is:

**“All children and young people in Cumbria who are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse are effectively identified, protected and supported by services. By understanding and reducing risk, preventing ongoing risk through disruption and pursuing those responsible for the exploitation we will improve outcomes for children and young people and communities in Cumbria”**

We will achieve our vision by working collectively to drive forward our four key priorities. We have developed an action plan to be delivered across Cumbria through a 'whole system' approach, strengthening existing partnerships to enable delivery of the strategy to tackle child exploitation, protecting children from harm.

## Key principles underpinning our multi-agency strategy:

- We have the safety and welfare of the child at the heart of everything we do.
- We listen to children and their families and seek their views in the development and review of services.
- We focus our work on early identification, intervention and prevention as well as disrupting and bringing perpetrators to justice.
- We take account of family circumstances when deciding how best to safeguard and protect the welfare of children.
- We recognise that young people's needs and behaviours should be understood in the wider context of their lives at home, friendship circles, health, education and public spaces (including online) and in the context of the vulnerabilities that impact on them such as criminal and sexual exploitation.
- We will not criminalise or blame victims.
- We scrutinise, challenge, monitor and review our work to ensure that we have a positive impact and make a difference to the lives of children and their families.
- We challenge fixed/uninformed views and language and work in different ways to respond to the new techniques being used to identify, groom and exploit vulnerable children.
- We liaise with neighbouring and other local authorities to ensure that we are linking with them for the purposes of safeguarding children.

## Strategic objectives

The ambition of CSCP is to work collaboratively with the local communities and a range of partners across different sectors to tackle the exploitation of children resident in Cumbria and those travelling into the county and being exploited.

The Child Exploitation Strategy has four key objectives based on the 4P framework. These objectives will be underpinned by a detailed action plan that holds partners to account for their plans to fulfil the actions set out across our priority areas.

### **PREPARE - Enable partners and communities to recognise child exploitation and continuously improve, learn and develop in our response to Child Exploitation.**

#### **Outcomes**

- The safeguarding of children in extra familial contexts is recognised as a priority for the partnership. Key people and partners understand and fulfil their role in supporting the agenda.
- Patterns, trends and themes of contextual risk and harm as it impacts upon children and young people is understood.
- Ensuring children's voices are heard, listened to, and acted upon by their participation in building our strategic priorities, plans and activities.
- Professionals understand contextual safeguarding and are supported in practice with systems, practice guidance, tools, and resources.
- The CSCP have quality assurance and oversight, using case audit and data to understand impact.
- Communities, including local businesses, schools and residents, are enabled to identify adolescent vulnerability and the signs and symptoms of exploitation; communities are part of the solution.
- Multi-agency and single agency training offer developed in contextual safeguarding and adolescent brain development with a focus on trauma informed practice and developing positive relationships, including the appropriate use of language, i.e. not victim blaming.

### **PREVENT - Stop people from becoming perpetrators of Child Exploitation and protect vulnerable young people through early identification, intervention, and support.**

#### **Outcomes**

- Multi-agency information and intelligence is gathered to identify risks and vulnerabilities in groups, communities, and individuals - to enable appropriately targeted support and interventions.
- Early help and prevention is well developed and delivered by professionals who understand the nature of contextual risk, promoting resilience - preventing deterioration and escalation.
- Children, young people, and their parents/carers are informed about the risks, can identify forms of contextual harm, and know how to access early support.
- Preventative and support programmes are delivered in early years/schools/colleges and in the community to promote their education and understanding of the extra familial risks and self-protection.
- Agencies work together to prevent young people going missing from home, care, and education.

**PROTECT - Effective and coordinated responses to safeguard and support victims, families and children who are vulnerable to child exploitation.**

**Outcomes**

- Safeguarding practice will be informed by best practice, guidance, research, and innovation.
- Professionals identify, assess, and effectively respond to children and young people involved in complex criminal, contextual, exploitation and abuse networks.
- Relationship based practice underpins work with children who are known or believed to be exploited.
- Responses for young people who go missing from home or care are swift and effective in reducing associated risk.
- Voice of young people is clearly recorded in plans and their feedback on interventions is used to inform service development.
- Where young people are moving into adulthood, partners will seek to identify transition support to ensure those who remain vulnerable have access to services and networks that can continue to engage and support them on their individual development journey.

**PURSUE - Stop incidents of Child Exploitation through disrupting, deterring, targeting, pursuing and prosecuting perpetrators.**

**Outcomes**

- Effective multi-agency engagement, joint planning and information sharing enables application of the full range of disruption tactics available through both criminal and civil routes to protect young people, including powers available in relation to modern slavery, licensing, health and safety, fraud, housing provision and other related legislation.
- Leaders, managers and practitioners from across the partnership understand the local problem profile and intelligence picture to support disruption: analytical support is coordinated across a range of agencies to identify themes, patterns and trends relating to exploitation activity and adolescent vulnerability.
- Robust offender management is in place to reduce the risk presented by known perpetrators (Including young perpetrators).
- Investigations are undertaken in line with working together principles: and ministry of justice guidelines for joint investigation.





## Child Exploitation Risk Assessment and Review

The Child Exploitation Risk Assessment and Review (CERAR) process was implemented in September 2021. The CERAR process aims to reduce inconsistencies in Child Exploitation practice through a uniformed approach to chairing and coordinating risk assessments and safety planning, ultimately improving our service response to children and young people including those who are becoming young adults, creating safety and reducing risk.

A CERAR manager and coordinator are in post. The CERAR manager will be involved in screening all Child Exploitation contacts that go into the Safeguarding Hub, they will chair all initial Child Exploitation risk assessment meetings (Level 1 meetings). The CERAR manager is also available to offer professional advice to colleagues across the partnership with regards to Child Exploitation. The CERAR coordinator will ensure the effective and efficient running of the CERAR process.

The Child Exploitation procedure including the pathways, vulnerability checklist and copy of the risk assessment tool can be accessed on the multi-agency procedures manual here:

**[https://cumbrialscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p\\_ch\\_exploit.html](https://cumbrialscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/p_ch_exploit.html)**



## What is your role in helping us tackle exploitation?

Whether you are a council member, a strategic leader, a frontline worker, a volunteer or a citizen who is active in their community, like all other forms of child abuse, protecting those at risk of exploitation is the responsibility of us all. You can start by firstly asking yourself these questions:

Organisations	Individuals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Are your Executive and Leadership team well informed of the issues and are they quick in their responses to improvement suggestions?</li> <li>■ Do you actively raise awareness of complex safeguarding issues amongst the workforce and those children, young people and adults they engage with and help them to understand?</li> <li>■ Do your employees, volunteers and beneficiaries know how to recognise the signs of exploitation and do they know what actions to take?</li> <li>■ Are your services providing the right support and intervention for survivors, at the right time?</li> <li>■ Do your services positively contribute to prevention and disruption and joining forces with others to share solutions?</li> <li>■ Are you supporting joint working, to promote understanding, knowledge and sharing best practice?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Do you know what sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and modern slavery and human trafficking is?</li> <li>■ Do you know the signs to look for?</li> <li>■ Do you know where to get advice?</li> <li>■ Do you know how to refer children and young people?</li> <li>■ Do you share your knowledge and expertise with your colleagues and partners?</li> <li>■ Are you doing everything you can to safeguard survivors and prevent future harm? This may simply be referring to the appropriate agencies.</li> <li>■ If you are a professional, do you know the range and role of services working to support and safeguard those at risk of exploitation and survivors?</li> <li>■ If you are a professional are you keeping up to date on policy and practice?</li> <li>■ Are you encouraged to access training and support?</li> </ul>

Now ask yourself, if the answer is no to one or more of the above, what action are you going to take.



## Delivery and monitoring

The delivery will be supported through strong strategic leadership. Political leaders, Chief Executives and senior leaders are committed to establishing a culture within which abuse, and exploitation is not tolerated.

This strategy has been agreed by the Cumbria Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. The strategy sets out the priorities and agrees an approach that enhances a county-wide approach to the issue of child exploitation

The Partnership Board have a Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Strategic Group where exploitation work is prioritised and coordinated through the Child Exploitation Delivery Plan. We will measure performance, both qualitatively and quantitatively, against the strategic objectives we have set and report on this every 6 months to the CSCP Board.

Key to measuring success against the strategy will be the experience of children and their families and the difference made to their lives.

To ensure that any emerging issues, legislative, process or policy changes are accounted for this strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis with more comprehensive reviews taking place after three years.



