

Summary

North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NYSCP) carried out a Learning Themed audit into the multi-agency safeguarding responses to child exploitation.

The audit focused on the circumstances which had led to the child/young person being recognised as at risk of exploitation and included a focus on the last six months of activity relating to the child/young person.

Children and young people experiencing child exploitation

Child exploitation can take different forms and can include sexual exploitation as well as criminal exploitation.

Child Sexual Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact and can occur through the use of technology.

The government's Serious Violence Strategy defines criminal child exploitation as occurring where an individual

or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator, or through violence or the threat of violence.

The most common form of child criminal exploitation is 'county lines' which refers to gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs around the UK using dedicated mobile phone lines or other forms of a 'deal line'.

What considerations are taken by agencies and professionals?

It is vital that people working in frontline roles effectively identify exploitation of children and work together proactively with other agencies to disrupt offending and safeguard victims. This can only be achieved by effective joined-up working and consistent, proactive, sharing of information held by different services.

The most common characteristics of child exploitation are:

- control, coercion, intimidation, threats of violence, and violence.
- associating with other children involved in exploitation
- a child or young person suffering from changes in emotional well-being and/or behaviour .
- use of drugs and alcohol.
- giving the child/young person gifts, money or new possessions.

- the child/young person missing for periods of time or regularly coming home late.
- the child/young person regularly missing school or education, suspensions, exclusions or not taking part in education.

Some additional signs that may be present if a child is a victim of sexual exploitation:

- coercion, manipulation or deception into sexual activity.
- having older romantic/sexual partners.
- suffering from sexually transmitted infections, displaying sexual behaviours beyond their expected sexual development, or becoming pregnant.

What did the audit find – areas working well?

The Multi-Agency Audit Group identified good practice across cases including:

- **Multi-Agency Communication:** The audit identified evidence of good communication between agencies
- **Multi-Agency Working:** There was evidence of good multi-agency work within MACE Level 1 and 2.
- **Engagement with Parents:** There was evidence of good communication and engagement with families.
- **Identification of Perpetrators:** Examples of effective use of the MACE arrangements to identify perpetrators and undertake disruption planning.
- **Child Abduction Warning Notices:** Effective use of CAWNs as a disruption tool.
- **Risk Assessments:** Risk assessments were found to be comprehensive, and risks were managed well.
- **Timeliness of responses:** Agencies were quick to react when Child Exploitation was identified.

What did the audit find – areas for development?

The Multi-Agency Audit Group identified the following areas for development across cases including:

- **Professional Curiosity:** There was evidence of the need for the ongoing promotion of the importance of professional curiosity.
- **SMART Plans:** While there was evidence of SMART (specific, measurable, articulate, realistic and timebound) planning in relation to Child Protection Plans, this was not consistent.
- **Early signs of exploitation:** The audit team identified the need for schools to be aware of the early indications of child exploitation to ensure that concerns can be raised as early as possible, this should include changes in behaviours, and language, as well as other wider indicators.
- **Joined up working:** There was evidence to suggest that further work could be undertaken to improve and link up disruption activity being undertaken in MACE Level 2 with the individual child's plan.
- **Focus on the Child:** While there was evidence of the voice of the child being captured by partners and within care plans, there was evidence in one case that assessments focused on the parental relationship rather than the needs of the child.
- **Engagement of agencies:** The audit group felt that in some cases additional agencies could have been involved in earlier meetings, for example, in one case primary care could have been engaged in initial meetings.

What has NYSCP done with these findings?

NYSCP has considered key learning points from this audit:

- A report with recommendations has been presented to the Practice and Learning Subgroup (PLS).
- The PLS will use the learning from this audit to identify any further actions required and develop appropriate guidance as required.

Next Steps

- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service during the audit day discussion.
- North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership will deliver awareness training to Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) within schools to look at recognising and responding to indicators of child exploitation.
- North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership to explore ways to improve the link between MACE Level 1 and 2 and the individual planning for children who are subject to harm outside the home. This will be led through MACE Strategic Group which will feed into the PLS.
- The PLS will review the existing multi-agency training provision regarding identification of early signs of exploitation, especially where they are symptomatic of other challenges the child was experiencing e.g. domestic abuse, child sexual abuse etc.

Resources

[Framework for decision-making: Right help, at the right time by the right person](#)

[Worried about a child?](#)

[NYSCP Standards and Criteria](#)

[BeAware Knowledge Hub](#)

[Child Sexual Exploitation procedures Tri.X](#)

[Criminal Exploitation and County Lines Practice Guidance](#)

[Multi Agency Child Exploitation and Contextual Safeguarding](#)

[Professional Curiosity Practice Guidance](#)

[County Lines, Cross Border Gangs and Cuckooing One Minute Guide](#)

[MACE & Contextual Safeguarding Lv. 1 One Minute Guide](#)

[MACE & Contextual Safeguarding Lv. 2 One Minute Guide](#)

[MACE Persons who pose a risk by Exploitation Process One Minute Guide](#)

[Submitting a Referral to the National Referral Mechanism \(NRM\) for a child One Minute Guide](#)