
Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet - 29 July 2024

Report Title

Child Exploitation Strategy 2024 – 2029

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Nicola Curley, Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Services

Report Author(s)

Tony Morrissey - Head of Service Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Tony.morrissey@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The Child Exploitation Strategy 2019-2022 was agreed by Cabinet in June 2019. The Strategy ran to the end of 2022 with a three-month extension period to deliver the new Strategy.

The Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29 (Appendix 1 to the report) has been developed in line with legislation and guidance.

The Strategy provides clear directive on the local key priorities:

- To have an effective response to tackling exploitation in Rotherham, from prevention, safeguarding systems, and identification of offenders to victim support.
- Reduce Exploitation from happening in Rotherham.
- Keeping children and young people safe from harm of exploitation.
- Identifying offenders of exploitation and bringing them to justice.

These are derived from the National Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy and draw from research into established working practices and will be driven by the Child Exploitation Delivery Group with strategic oversight from the Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership. The Strategy provides clarity on roles and responsibilities of key partner agencies, how they work together to deliver the key priorities and how success will be measured.

This report provides a brief introduction and requests endorsement of the new Strategy.

Recommendations

1. That Cabinet endorse the Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29.
2. That Cabinet approve the Local Authority involvement in the development and implementation of the Strategy Delivery Plan and the oversight of progress by; the Child Exploitation Delivery Group (CEDG), Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (RSCP) and the Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) Improving Lives Select Commission (ILSC).

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1	Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-2029
Appendix 2	Draft Work Plan for Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29
Appendix 3	CSE Strategy 2019-22 Update Closure Report
Appendix 4	Part A Initial Equality Screening Assessment
Appendix 5	Part B Equality Screening Assessment
Appendix 6	Carbon Impact report

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Background Papers

The Child Exploitation Strategy 2019 – 2022

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Yes

Considered by Improving Lives Select Commission

Council Approval Required

No

The Child Exploitation Strategy 2024–29

1. Background

- 1.1 The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties: section 17 of the Children Act 1989 puts a duty on the local authority to provide services to children in need in their area, regardless of where they are found; section 47 of the same Act requires local authorities to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.
- 1.2 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 – A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (2023), states: whilst it is parents and carers who have primary care for their children, local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.
- 1.3 The Children Act 2004 states that safeguarding duties placed on the local authority can only be discharged with the full co-operation of other partners, many of whom have individual duties when carrying out their functions under section 11 of the Act. The Social Work Act 2017 brought about changes to how partners work together, the Act abolished Local Safeguarding Children Boards, and replaced with an equal partnership, putting duties on three 'safeguarding partners' - the local authority, Clinical Commissioning Group (now Integrated Care Board) and the Chief Officer of Police - to make safeguarding arrangements that respond to the needs of children in their area.
- 1.4 The 2021 National Strategy – Tackling Child Sexual Abuse provides a blueprint for driving action across Government, agencies, sectors, and communities to tackle child sexual abuse. It defines Child Sexual Exploitation: forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving violence, or whether the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, and may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse.
- 1.5 Home Office Guidance (2020) defines Child Criminal Exploitation as '*where an individual or group coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 to take part in criminal activities, including but not exclusively County Lines*'. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact, it can also occur through the use of technology.
- 1.6 The Strategy sets out how partners across Rotherham with responsibility for delivering services to children and young people will deliver on their collective responsibilities to keep children safe from child exploitation over the next five years. Child Exploitation includes Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, Radicalisation, Modern slavery, Human Trafficking and Honour Based Violence.

1.7 The Strategy demonstrates how key partners work together, and the key meetings which provide oversight. Organisational roles and responsibilities are explained in Appendix 2.

2. Key Issues

2.1 The Previous Child Exploitation Strategy 2019 -2022 was published in 2019.

2.2 Progress against the 5 priorities in the previous Child Exploitation Strategy has been reviewed for completion and recognition of achievement, and to support the development of the new Strategy. Where actions remain ongoing such as training and awareness raising activities, they are reflected in the priorities within the new Strategy and will be included in the Delivery Plan.

2.2.1 1. Safeguarding Vulnerable Children – Responding to Child Exploitation

Achievements:

- The Evolve team was expanded to create a child exploitation team, encompassing CCE alongside CSE, creating a singular Child Exploitation pathway.
- Missing children cohort – Through positive work with children, residential homes, and foster carers the number of Looked After Children (LAC) who go missing significantly reduced, alongside repeat episodes. The overall trend for the combined years 2022/2024 has continued to be a downward one for both children and young people who are not LAC and LAC, although, there has been a slight increase in LAC going missing in 2023/24.
- Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) replaced Risk Assessment Management (RAM). The change brought Rotherham into line with national terminology ensuring that those in attendance at the meeting, including partners from across a regional border, understood the remit of the meeting and so had better understanding of the remit and more engaged in the process resulting in a more robust system to keep children safe.
- Preventative work is undertaken with regular high risk missing young people on a 1:1 basis to safeguard, provide intervention, build a relationship, and to look at diversionary activities. This supported the reduction in the number of missing episodes, and particularly contributed to the safety planning and risk reduction for those high-risk children.

2.2.2 • Support to Victims and Survivors – Post Abuse Support, Child Sexual Exploitation commissioned services for victims and survivors

Achievements:

- Establishment of a consultative referral pathway through the Trauma and Resilience Service (TRS) which is delivered through Rotherham, Doncaster, and South Humber NHS Trust (RDaSH) and funded by NHS South Yorkshire, Rotherham. Using this pathway, professionals can refer into these services, and

TRS will allocate to the specific service above according to individual need, available capacity, and specialisms.

- Continued to commission Post Abuse Support, Child Sexual Exploitation services for victims and survivors. The service is an all-age service; however, this is predominantly targeting transition working as there is an internal pathway of support within the Council for young people under 18.
- In 2022/23, the 3 Post CSE Support Services (GROW, Rothacs and Rise) received a total of 317 referrals. It is important to note that this does not necessarily mean 317 victims and survivors as some victims and survivors will access different elements of the support at different times and therefore may be counted in the data multiple times. In 2023/24, there have been 562 referrals to the Post CSE Services.
- For the survivors where outcomes were recorded in the year 2023/24 (86% of all leavers had outcome recorded):
 - 83% rated their mental health & wellbeing as maintained or improved.
 - 81% rated their feelings/thoughts about themselves as maintained or improved.
 - 84% rated the effect of their trauma as maintained or improved.
 - 70% rated their relationship with family and or social network as maintained or improved.

2.2.3 2. Learning & Development – Awareness Raising and Training

Achievements:

- Annual Elected Members Session - Introduction to Child Exploitation, tackling it in Rotherham.
- Safeguarding Awareness Week (SAW) held in November 2021, 2022, and 2023, attended by practitioners across the partnership, included workshops and information events including Child Exploitation and County lines training delivered by RMBC and SYP. There was also social media presence in respect to online abuse and promoting safeguarding is everyone's business.
- The Evolve service continue to raise awareness through delivery of Child Exploitation training on a quarterly basis. They attend social care and early help team meetings, and schools to raise awareness on spotting the signs of different types of exploitation and what action to take, which may include making a referral to children's social care.
- Child Exploitation Awareness Day takes place on 18th March every year. In 2022, this day included the Safeguarding Champions promoting the online Child Exploitation training, screen savers on council computers, online workshops, social media presence and more.

- SYP launched their new regional child exploitation campaign on the 18th of March 2023, 'Even the happiest Childhood Can be Destroyed by Exploitation'. Following this the campaign was then launched across various SYP channels.
- Safeguarding Awareness and Learning Day (SALD) took place on the 22 June 2022. This day included computer screensavers promoting safeguarding, social media presence promoting safeguarding, safeguarding Zcards with safeguarding information and who to contact if you have concerns, which were delivered to key council staff across the borough and targeting staff that don't work on computers but are working in communities, this includes refuge men, maintenance, security, libraries and more.
- The Spot the Signs campaign was refreshed for Safeguarding Awareness Week (SAW21) in November 2021 and continued to be shared throughout 2022. This was aimed at the wider partnership workforce and communities.
- A Rotherham partnership wide training package has been developed focusing on Child Exploitation and is available to statutory partners working with children across Rotherham. This training commenced in March 2024, with a focus on unconscious bias with 215 practitioners having been trained to date.
- Digital Safety bespoke training package was delivered to professionals from across the partnership, focusing on online safety.

2.2.4 3. Child Protection and Detection of Crime – Operation Keep Safe

Achievements:

- Operation Keepsafe – Early Help and South Yorkshire Police lead on Keepsafe Interventions across the Borough. Since its initiation operation Keepsafe have worked with approximately 1700 children and young people in the community.
- Operation Makesafe – joint Police and Local Authority initiative that has been taking place throughout the year targeting the hospitality industry to raise awareness on the signs of exploitation.
- There have also been a number of other police operations which have led to children being safeguarded from criminal exploitation, with investigations ongoing.

2.2.5 4. Operation Stovewood

Achievements:

- As of November 2023, NCA officers have made over 200 arrests and secured 34 convictions. Those convicted have been handed prison sentences totalling around 260 years. There are currently 50 active investigations as part of Operation Stovewood. The NCA remains committed to seeing these cases through to the end of the criminal justice process, which is anticipated to continue into 2027.

- Mapping of support services completed to ensure pathway for support was available to victims and survivors at point of need.
- Streamlining of support referral pathway completed for the victims, survivors to access support at their time of need and that is flexible around matching need to the services available.
- Meetings co-ordinated with Trauma & Resilience Service / Mothers for Justice Representatives and Voluntary Consortium – partnership to support mothers/children of suspects arrested under Operation Stovewood to ensure that support is available and in place for all victims and survivors including victims of exploitation, and wives / children of perpetrators.

2.2.6 Focused Visit May 2024

Ofsted looked at the Local Authority's arrangements for children in need or subject to a child protection plan in line with the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework. There was a strong recognition of both the Local Authority's and the Safeguarding Partnership's continued progress. Key findings include:

- That when children require help and protection, they receive high quality and effective support.
- The children's cases reviewed demonstrated thorough assessments of need and risk, resulting in children and families receiving the right help and support at the right time.
- There is a robust appetite for improvement and holding to account those delivering services to children to perform better across the Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- Senior leaders ensure there are effective lines of accountability across children's social care.

2.3 The Strategy is aligned to the Safer Rotherham Partnership Priorities 2022-25:

- Protecting vulnerable children
- Protecting vulnerable adults
- Safer and Stronger communities

2.4 The Strategy is reflective of the partnership arrangements in Rotherham and demonstrates the continued commitment to listening to the voice and lived experience of victims and survivors and using this to develop services. There remains a focus on community engagement and partnerships with families, parents and carers and children and young people in the strategy that will be a key priority for its duration.

2.5 It is proposed the associated Delivery Plan for the Strategy will be developed with key milestones for each of the objectives, and outcome measures identified. The Delivery Plan will be approved by the RSCP Executive and progress against this will be owned by the CEDG, who will provide update reports to each RSCP Executive meeting.

Annual review of the delivery plan will be undertaken, and the plan updated each year as a result, to reflect progress and focus.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Cabinet is asked to endorse the Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-2029.

Endorsement of the Child Exploitation Strategy 2024- 2029 will ensure the Council has set out its commitment in line with its duty to ensure that there is safeguarding arrangements in place for all children and specifically those at risk of exploitation.

3.2 Cabinet is asked to approve the Local Authority involvement in the development and implementation of the Strategy Delivery Plan and the oversight of progress by; the Child Exploitation Delivery Group (CEDG), Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership (RSCP) and the Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) Improving Lives Select Commission (ILSC).

3.3 The alternative option is not to endorse the Strategy. This is not recommended as the Strategy is a co-produced multi-agency document that incorporates the delivery and governance for a range of key national and local programmes designed to improve outcomes and the quality of life for children, young people, and families in the Borough. Do not endorse the Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-2029.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 The development of the revised Strategy has involved collaborative working across Rotherham, including Child Exploitation Delivery Group (CEDG), Child Exploitation steering group, Rotherham Safeguarding Children Partnership, Children and Young Peoples Leadership Team (DLT), Evolve, Youth Justice Service, Children and Young People, Commissioning, Performance, Legal Services and Finance.

4.2 At an away day in June 2022 the CEDG considered the recommendations from The Myers review, and which then laid the foundations for this strategy.

4.3 A stakeholder event was carried out on 1 February 2024 with RSCP statutory and wider partners, this was facilitated by the RSCP chair, Darren Downs and offered the opportunity for partners to share their experience of the current Rotherham context and vision for the strategy.

4.4 Consultation has taken place with young people with lived experience. They provided feedback that the current strategy is ok for adults and professionals, but they would like a young person's version. Plans are underway to co-produce a version of the strategy which is accessible to young people.

4.5 The Trauma Resilience Service evaluation reports 2020 and 2022 have been reviewed, the evaluations were undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University and produced in co-production with victims and survivors; and the REMIDI report and meeting with victims to seek their voice and understand their experience of the investigation process and how they experience services all which informed the development and priorities in the strategy.

4.6 On 19th January 2023, the Improving Lives Select Commission held a workshop to consider the Strategy. The recommendations made have been incorporated into the development of the Strategy and associated governance arrangements.

4.7 The following themes emerged from the ILSC workshop;

- Clearer explanation of the Rotherham Journey
- Organisational roles and responsibilities
- Gaps in activity including how we Promote awareness and Provide Support and use voice and lived experience.
- Some terms need explaining

4.8 The Strategy has been further developed to reflect this feedback;

- Addition of 'Our Journey' section
- Addition of Organisational roles and responsibilities section and detailed Appendix
- Additional Promote priority included under Prepare heading and Provide Support priority included under Protect.
- Information regarding how voice and lived experience influence activity added throughout.
- Glossary updated

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 The current Strategy is to the end of 2022, with a 12-month period of transition, supported by the CE work plan.

5.2 The new Strategy will cover the period 2024-2029.

5.3 Progress against the delivery plan and review of objectives will be undertaken annually by Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

5.4 An Annual Report will be presented to Improving Lives Select Commission for scrutiny.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from review of the strategy or from implementing the strategy delivery plan and the priorities therein – through the services provided by the Council or working with partner organisations (under the multi-agency approach).

6.2 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the recommendations detailed in this report. Where there is a need for the Council to commission services from third party organisations to deliver the Strategy, this must be done in compliance with the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules and the relevant procurement legislation (Public Contracts Regulations 2015, the Procurement Act 2023, or the Health Care Services (Provider Selection Regime) Regulations 2023. Early consideration needs to be given in the development of any commissioned

services to ensure the chosen delivery vehicle includes the flexibility to meet the requirements of the Strategy.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The statutory framework for Local Authorities overarching responsibility for safeguarding all children is within the Children Act 1989 and 2004. Under s17 and s47 of the Children Act 1989 there are duties to provide services to children in need in our area and if it is believed that a child has suffered or is likely to suffer harm, there is a duty to make enquiries.
- 7.2 Regarding the crime of child sexual exploitation which is a form of sexual abuse, there is specific governmental advice and guidance around appropriate action to take to support children and families including the management of and disruption around the actions of perpetrators in the non-statutory guidance, "Child Sexual Exploitation, February 2017. Such guidance supplements the updated statutory guidance, "Working Together, December 2023 which assists those working with children and families to understand this level of risk to children, to respond swiftly and proportionately. Such guidance is relevant to any CSE strategy to equip practitioners accordingly whilst being viewed within the wider continuum of sexual abuse and other relevant issues such as trafficking, modern slavery, domestic abuse and other gendered violence and going missing as has been addressed in our Closure report 19-22 and CE Priorities Plan.
- 7.3 Furthermore, in line with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023, safeguarding partners should agree the criteria of assessment to inform services commissioned and delivered in their local area to ensure "the right help is given to children at the right time." Such arrangements include partnership working with various organisations, setting out how priorities will be delivered, thus fulfilling our obligations in this regard.
- 7.4 The relevant legal duties have been adhered to within the CE strategy discussed in this report. Therefore, given what is proposed, no legal implications arise by endorsing the CE strategy including the development and progress of the implementation process as recommended.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 No direct HR implications within this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 Implications to vulnerable children and young people are covered within the Report and Child Exploitation strategy in Appendices.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 Equality and human rights are considered within the strategy.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 No direct CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change implications within this report.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Implications for partners are reflected in the draft strategy.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 These are referred to in the draft strategy and associated delivery plan.

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp OBE	20.6.24
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	7.6.24
Assistant Director, Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	7.6.24

Report Authors:

Laura Gough, Head of Service, Safeguarding Quality and Practice

Laura.gough@rotherham.gov.uk

Helen Sweaton, Assistant Director, Commissioning, Performance and Quality

helen.sweaton@rotherham.gov.uk

This report is published on the Council's [website](#).