

Public Report
Improving Lives Select Commission

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Improving Lives Select Commission – 28 April 2026

Report Title

Update on Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29

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

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Executive Director Approving Submission of the Report

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

Report Author(s)

Chris MacDonald, Head of Safeguarding, Children & Young People's Services

chris.macdonald@rotherham.gov.uk

Kelly White, Service Director Family Help, Children & Young People's Services

Kelly.white@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

In July 2024, Cabinet approved the *Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29: A Vision for Managing Risk Outside The Home* published by Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership. This report outlines progress against the objectives in the Strategy at the conclusion of the second of the five years.

Recommendations

1. That Improving Lives Select Commission note the progress made against the Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29.

Background Papers

1. [Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29: A Vision for Managing Risk Outside The Home](#)
2. [Cabinet Report 29th July 2024 – Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29](#)

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

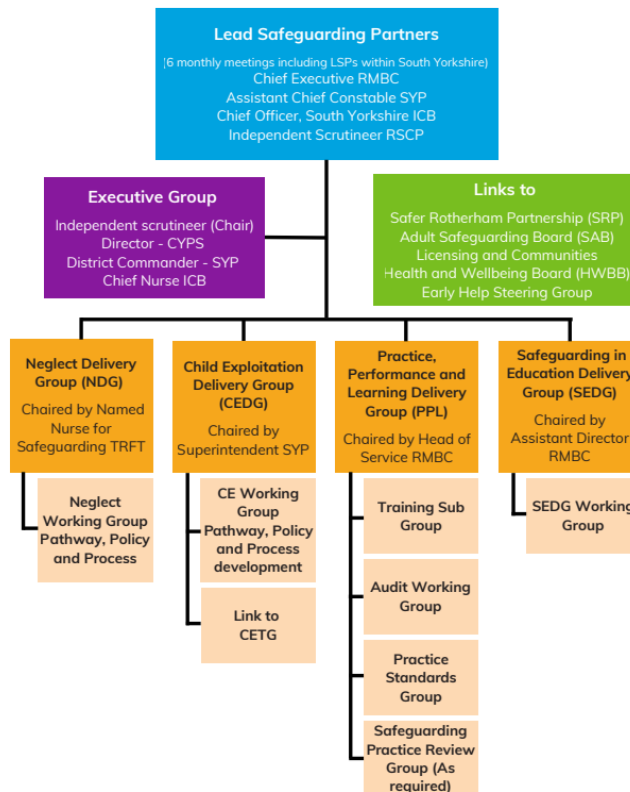
No

Update on Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29

1. Background

- 1.1 Exploitation of children is a pernicious crime and the Council's commitment to tackling it remains unwavering, as does our commitment to listen and learn from past mistakes. In July 2024, Cabinet approved the *Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29: A Vision for Managing Risk Outside The Home* published by Rotherham Safeguarding Children's Partnership. This report outlines progress against the objectives in the Strategy at the conclusion of the second of the five years.
- 1.2 The Council has a duty to safeguard children and provide services to children and their families to promote their welfare. The Council also has a duty to work with partner agencies and partner agencies have a duty to work with the Council to keep children safe. These duties are found in primary legislation such as Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 and statutory guidance, the most prominent of which is Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026. Local Safeguarding Children's Partnerships engage the three statutory partners – the Council, the Integrated Care Board and the Police – in developing multi-agency safeguarding arrangements which set out how this will happen. This provides the framework for the implementation of the Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29.
- 1.3 The Strategy advances the outcome on the Council Plan that children and young people achieve their potential.
- 1.4 Child exploitation is not easily defined. The Strategy explains that there are multiple forms of harm which are exploitative, including child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation, radicalisation and trafficking. Definitions, some of which are statutory, can be found in the appendices to the Strategy. A common thread in all exploitation of children is using an imbalance of power to manipulate, coerce or control a child to make them behave in way which the exploitative adult wants, for their own benefit.
- 1.5 Our Child Exploitation Delivery Group (CEDG) has responsibility for the progress against the four priorities. CEDG reports to the Delegated Safeguarding Partners, known as the Executive, and ultimate responsibility is held by the Lead Safeguarding Partners. The governance structure within the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership is outlined below. There is also a reciprocal connection between Child Exploitation Delivery Group and the Safer Rotherham Partnership. Delegated Safeguarding Partners scrutinise progress every two months and the Lead Safeguarding Partners twice annually. There is an annual review of the progress and direction of each Delivery Group conducted by the Independent Scrutineer.

RSCP Structure



- 1.6 CEDG is chaired by the Detective Superintendent for Rotherham in South Yorkshire Police. There is consistent and broad multi-agency representation, including Community Safety and Licensing. CEDG has working groups which ensure progress against the workplan and close links to Child Exploitation Tactical Group and Serious and Organised Crime Tactical Group, which are operational meetings where themes requiring a strategic response may emerge.
- 1.7 Within Rotherham Children and Young People’s Services, children at risk of exploitation and/or radicalisation are allocated within our Evolve service, where specialist social workers and family support workers will work to increase their safety. Where children maintain their existing social worker, for example for children in our care, there will be the child’s social worker jointly working with the Evolve worker.
- 1.8 We have developed an approach to working with ‘extra-familial harm’, which is harm that children, most often adolescents, experience outside their home and which traditional child protection models do not satisfactorily address. Our ‘Harm Outside The Home’ approach includes an alternative pathway to child protection for children who may be at risk of significant harm outside but not inside their home. In this approach, independent Chairs oversee a multi-agency plan with any parent as a partner. Working Together 2026, issued 31st March 2026, introduced a section on ‘supporting children suffering or likely to suffer harm outside the home’.
- 1.9 On 2nd November 2025, Ofsted concluded their ILACS inspection of Rotherham Children and Young People’s Services with an Outstanding

judgement. Within the report (p.11), the Council's approach to keeping children safe from exploitation was lauded: *Children at risk of going missing from home and being exploited receive a highly effective service from Evolve, the specialist exploitation team. Children are routinely offered timely return home interviews, enabling professionals to understand the reasons for children going missing, and to inform safety and trigger plans for children. When concerns are escalating, multi-agency child exploitation meetings are convened promptly to share intelligence and coordinate disruption strategies. Comprehensive exploitation risk assessments are completed by social workers and inform multi-agency interventions. Children receive support from knowledgeable, skilled practitioners who build trusting relationships through consistent, trauma-informed engagement. This relational approach increases children's confidence in trusted adults, enabling disclosure and strengthening protective factors.*

2. Key Issues

2.1 There are four priorities in our Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29, and these guide the delivery plan. These priorities are:

1. **Prepare** - To have an effective response to tackling exploitation in Rotherham.
2. **Prevent** – To reduce exploitation in Rotherham.
3. **Protect** – To disrupt exploitation and keep children and young people safe from harm through exploitation.
4. **Pursue** – To identify offenders and bring them to justice.

2.2 **Prepare:** progress against our objectives includes -

- Improved early intervention, as identified through partner agencies completing more of our Family Assessments of Need. This is the universal assessment template used at all stages of help and harm, which means that a family need only tell their story once.
- Regular multi-agency training programme for child exploitation, led by our specialist Evolve service, which considers wider 'Harm Outside The Home' approaches too.
- Rigorous approach to taxi licensing in Rotherham, which was commended in Baroness Casey's National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.
- An overarching Safeguarding Board Chairs meeting, led by Chief Superintendent Andy Wright, now coordinates the activity of the Health and Wellbeing Board, Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership, Safeguarding Adults Board and Safer Rotherham Partnership on cross-cutting issues such as child exploitation.
- Section 175 self-assessments, which are an annual audit undertaken by educational establishments, and our follow-up assurance visits explicitly consider how schools safeguard children from exploitation and online harm. RHSE (Relationships, Health and Sex Education) includes an understanding of the dynamics of grooming and exploitation.

- 2.3 **Prevent:** progress against our objectives includes -
- Using Operation Makesafe and Operation Keepsafe as tactics to disrupt and dissuade exploitation in the borough. Operation Makesafe is a national initiative where environments where exploitation can occur, like night-time economy venues and hotels, are engaged in understanding the signs, and Operation Keepsafe is a more localised initiative involving community patrols by safeguarding professionals at key times like evenings to engage young people who are in the community.
 - *Fearless* campaign targeted young people aged 11 to 16 years old to empower them to report crime, including knife crime, drug dealing and exploitation, anonymously.
 - South Yorkshire Police have attended a number of forums, including the Designated Safeguarding Lead forum where each school is represented, to promote intelligence sharing.
 - Due to an emerging threat in the form of exploitation online, a comprehensive training programme was delivered by South Yorkshire Police and Children's Services to a wide range of professionals, totalling more than 250 attendees.
- 2.4 **Protect:** progress against our objectives includes -
- Robust multi-agency data which allows us to monitor trends. This includes a range of measures for the Police including intelligence, referrals and offences which relate to child exploitation.
 - The Harm Outside The Home approach extends the role of an independent Chair to more young people, by including children who are found to be in need but not at risk of significant harm, and provides a clear route to coordination and accountability.
- 2.5 **Pursue:** progress against our objectives includes -
- Built strong links with Probation, who attend CETG consistently, which provides joined up management of risks from offenders.
 - Weekly CETG provides a multi-agency environment to assess and manage risk, including legal powers to disrupt exploitation. Successful operation and criminal prosecutions have emerged from CETG.
 - Service Manager for Evolve and Duty & Assessment in CYPS and the RSCP Business Manager attend Organised and Violent Crime Silver Group to ensure a robust multi-agency approach to the role of organised crime in child exploitation.
 - There are commissioned services which support survivors of child sexual exploitation, child and adult, with recovery from their experiences.
- 2.6 Priorities in the next 12 months include:
- Developing the Harm Outside The Home approach to grow the focus on locations and 'hotspots', in conjunction with CETG and Neighbourhood Tasking Groups and Community Action Partnerships.
 - Positioning the workplan to ensure a focus on what data demonstrates are the most prominent forms of harm.

- Improved interface for partners with the launch of the Children’s Portal, which will allow partner agencies to submit their Family Assessment of Need directly onto Early Help and Children’s Social Care systems.
- Sharpening the link between intelligence and the focus of Operation Keepsafe and Operation Makesafe.
- Developing improved child exploitation training packages for non-traditional partners from the leisure and hotel industries.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

3.1 Members are asked to note the progress made against the Child Exploitation Strategy 2024-29.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 Not applicable.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Not applicable.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

6.1 Not applicable.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

7.1 Not applicable.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

8.1 Not applicable.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

9.1 Not applicable.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

10.1 Not applicable.

11. Implications for CO₂ Emissions and Climate Change

11.1 Not applicable.

12. Implications for Partners

12.1 Not applicable.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 The risks involved with the continued strategy are:

- Failing to meet objectives in the workplan.
- Changing profile of exploitation, particularly toward majority or hybrid online, making existing strategies less effective.
- Disrupted inter-agency relationships in specialist exploitation services through changes mandated by Families First Programme to create multi-agency child protection teams.

13.2 Mitigations to manage these risks include:

- Robust management of the workplan and clear governance.
- Pre-emptive shifting of emphasis to better explore risks from online harm and exploitation, which has begun across 2025.
- Focused implementation of Families First Programme, which is led by the Executive of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership, ensuring we preserve what works effectively already.

Accountable Officer(s)

Chris MacDonald, Head of Safeguarding
Kelly White, Service Director, Family Help

Approvals obtained on behalf of:

| | Name | Date |
|--|--|-------------|
| The Executive Director with responsibility for this report | Nicola Curley, Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services | 31/03/26 |
| Consultation undertaken with the relevant Cabinet Member | Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People - Councillor Cusworth | 13/04/26 |

Report Authors:

Chris MacDonald, Head of Safeguarding, Children & Young People's Services
chris.macdonald@rotherham.gov.uk

Kelly White, Service Director Family Help, Children & Young People's Services
Kelly.white@rotherham.gov.uk

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