

Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership



Child Exploitation Strategy

2020- 2022



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Introduction

This is the new Pan-Dorset, Multi Agency Child Exploitation Strategy. Its purpose is to ensure an overarching strategy across Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) and Dorset, to ensure an effective and coordinated response to children and young people at risk of, or linked to exploitation, identifying potential risk early to reduce risk and harm.

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.

***Contextual Safeguarding** seeks to identify and respond to harm and abuse posed to young people outside their home, either from adults or other young people. (NSPCC definition)*

Child exploitation, a form of child abuse which involves using a child for some sort of personal or financial advantage, is multi-faceted and interrelated.

There are several different forms of Child Exploitation including:

- Child criminal exploitation
- Child sexual exploitation
- 'County lines'
- Human trafficking and modern slavery
- Radicalisation

These types of abuse are complex and often hidden. They occur when children and young people are coerced and/or forced to perform sexual, criminal or other grooming acts of other young people by peers and/or adults for their own gains.

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.

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.

Due to the cycle and pattern of exploitation, protecting children from exploitation requires people from all organisations and communities to work collaboratively to understand, to build trust with young people and to minimise the risk by focussing on the perpetrators of abuse.

This strategy responds to and works to deliver on our statutory duties set out in national guidance in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), supported by locally developed action plans in both Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) and Dorset Council areas, reflecting the place-based, community approach required to tackle child exploitation.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to 'protect and support children who are at risk of, or have been subject to, child exploitation. We will fulfil this mission by understanding and reducing risk, preventing ongoing risk through disruption and pursuing those responsible for the exploitation'.

We will work collectively to:

- **Prepare** – through effective, multi-agency leadership, governance and a wider culture embedded within organisations and communities, we will prevent children from being exploited or ongoing exploitation.
- **Prevent** – through timely intervention, information-sharing and services provided to children, young people, parents, carers, friends and communities via a multi-agency strengths-based approach.
- **Protect** – through engagement with children and young people at risk of, or experiencing, criminal exploitation, as well as their families and communities, ensuring that their voices, and the voices of survivors, are heard and responded to in building safer communities.
- **Pursue** – through successful disruption and prosecution of those who perpetrate or facilitate the exploitation of children and young people.

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 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 will achieve this by continually improving our performance and auditing framework.
- 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.

What do we know about child exploitation pan-Dorset?

In 2019 the updated Pan Dorset Child Exploitation Risk Assessment toolkit was launched providing a consistent method of identifying and assessing the risk to a child of exploitation in its various forms.

We know that a number of children pan-Dorset are considered to be at significant risk of exploitation, ranging from children experiencing child sexual exploitation to criminal exploitation, including county lines.

Rates of exploitation are higher in the urban areas of Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole and Weymouth. This is also associated with the higher drug misuse within these areas.

Working together across the partnership will help us to safeguard our children from being exploited, by effectively targeting our resources to provide help early, including support to families and communities.

Our Programmes

As multi-agency partners we are committed to driving forward on four programmes:

Prepare - enhancing systems and process to enable better understanding of local need, raising awareness and knowledge and developing a responsive culture through embedding child exploitation awareness within all agencies in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and Dorset areas.

- **Prevent** - prevent children experiencing exploitation by ensuring as many people as possible know the risks and signs and how to report them.
- **Protect** - identify those at risk, providing them with early help and support victims to break free from exploitation and help rebuild their lives.
- **Pursue** - identify, disrupt and prosecute those who are intent on exploiting children.



Programme 1: Prepare

Having the right systems and process in place, underpinned by effective partnership and governance arrangements, are essential in building a responsive culture where everyone can contribute to tackling exploitation.

To ensure we deploy our resources in the right place at the right time, we need to understand our local picture through profiling and analytical information on how we are performing. To do this

we will use and share intelligence effectively to identify children at risk of or experiencing exploitation.

We will develop a highly skilled, knowledgeable, multi-agency workforce, implementing new approaches to working with children which focus on strength and managing risk. We will provide training and support which address the complexities of identifying and responding to child exploitation.

Accompanying training, we will provide opportunities to undertake reflective practice, learn from one another and access ongoing supervision. This will also support the health and wellbeing of our workforce, recognising the emotional impact this work has on individuals and teams.

We know that education and awareness programmes can be provided on what to look out for and how to report concerns. This can positively enhance disruption activity and increase protective capabilities. We will actively work with individuals, communities, businesses and organisations such as hoteliers/licensed premises, bed and breakfasts, private landlords, taxi drivers, transport companies (bus/rail), British Transport Police, park wardens, refuse collectors, retail workers, community and religious groups (amongst others) who may hold vital information about the movement of victims and perpetrators.



We will:

- Ensure all agencies have systems in place to enable tracking of exploitation and develop our use of business intelligence to improve sharing across organisations.
- Ensure multiagency information sharing agreements are in place and reviewed regularly.
- Publish and encourage the use of police intelligence sharing forms.
- Identify, monitor and take action at vulnerable locations.

Programme 2: Prevent

We will have a clear focus on prevention. The effects of child exploitation are serious and far reaching, and we aim to prevent the abuse happening in the first place.

Through campaigns and education programmes, we will raise awareness of and prevent exploitation, focussing on particularly vulnerable and hard to reach groups. This will include how children and parents/ carers can keep themselves safe online, in their homes, schools, faith-based organisations and other groups and communities.

We will provide information to teachers, parents and communities, helping them to understand the risks, recognise the signs that a child may be vulnerable or subject to abuse, and take appropriate action.

Working alongside children and young people and their families/ carers, we will co-design services and how these are delivered, including use of appropriate language and methods for communicating key messages and how to seek support before risks escalate.

We know that children in care and those who go missing regularly are at increased risk of exploitation. We will ensure that all partners meet their statutory duties in relation to missing episodes and children returning from missing episodes. We will continue to work together to address vulnerability at the point of children leaving care. We will use robust intelligence to understand the push and pull factors and criminal gangs, giving us better understanding and responses from a child level.

We will:

- Gather information to identify risks and vulnerabilities in groups and individuals.
- Undertake awareness raising campaigns.
- Mobilise the multi-agency early help response.
- Develop targeted education and training programmes for children, parents/ families/ carers, schools, clubs/ groups.
- Ensure information is easily accessible.
- Develop area-based training programme for our workforce and organisations so they are aware of their obligations.

Programme 3: Protect

Protecting and responding to those who are at risk, providing them with early help and supporting children and young people who have experienced exploitation is key to helping them to rebuild and lead healthy lives.

Local partners are in a good position to be able to provide appropriate services to identify, support and protect children and young people who are vulnerable to or experiencing exploitation and to safeguard and protect them from further harm.

We will support people who have experienced exploitation and will not criminalise or blame victims.

Taking a strengths-based approach, we will work with the person and the issue, rather than the emerging symptoms, which will contribute to breaking cycles and lead to better outcomes. In doing this, we will work within the context in which exploitation takes place. We will develop safer spaces and places for young people and work with them through transitions to ensure they receive the support and services they require as they move into adulthood.

We will work with young people who are vulnerable to becoming perpetrators and those who are perpetrators across all areas of exploitation.

At a place-based level we will:

- Understand the push and pull factors for those who go missing and are drawn into exploitation.
- Put support in place to meet the needs of children who have experienced exploitation, including risk assessing out of area children and young people before they return or are returned to their home area.
- Review our multi-agency approach to supporting adolescents.
- Ensure the wider children's workforce understands and has the skills to respond appropriately when exploitation is identified.
- Implement a multi-agency training programme that ensures all practitioners have the skills to respond in a trauma informed way.
- Review the impact of the practice toolkit that includes a

Programme 4: Pursue

We are committed to ensuring that we will do all we can to disrupt perpetrators who are exploiting children and young people and where possible prosecute them.

We will build on the work of committed and skilled professionals, take a strategic approach to identifying, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators, share intelligence on the perpetrator profile and utilise the wide range of police powers to disrupt those seeking to exploit children and young people from or in our area.

Developing systems to enhance information-sharing and providing clear guidance to support effective collection and recording of evidence, is crucial to improve performance in this area. Learning from national and local experience is vital to ensure continuous improvement.

We will build in regular reviews, analysis and feedback to and ensure this learning is shared widely.

Governance, Monitoring and Evaluation

The Pan-Dorset Safeguarding Children Partnership has the issue of Child Exploitation firmly on its agenda. Both local authority areas have established individual governance arrangements to ensure a robust line of sight to child exploitation in their respective areas.

Each Council area has multi-agency Tactical level plans for addressing Child Exploitation.

We will:

- Undertake robust enforcement activity.
- Utilise all legal options to maximise the disruption of exploitation to ensure the child or young person is safe from the perpetrator and flexibly apply disruption techniques.
- Ensure information is shared to assist with prosecutions.
- Ensure there is an appropriate balance between enforcement activity and safeguarding responses for children who are pulled into criminal activity recognising their vulnerability.

Appendix 1

Definitions

Contextual safeguarding

This approach to safeguarding 'seeks to identify and respond to harm and abuse posed to young people outside their home, either from adults or other young people'. (NSPCC definition)

Child criminal exploitation

Child Criminal Exploitation occurs 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 (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can occur through the use of technology.

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It 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 (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. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual.

Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology' (Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation, HM Government, February 2017).

Children and young people who become involved face risks to their physical, emotional and psychological health and wellbeing. Any young person could become a victim of child exploitation; the crime affects both girls and boys, from any background and ethnicity. It is the organised and deliberate exploitation of a child purely for the sexual gratification of adults or other young people. There are three main types: inappropriate relationships, boyfriend model and organised sexual exploitation.

County lines

'County lines' is a form of criminal exploitation. It is a police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or 'deal lines'. It involves child criminal exploitation (CCE) as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. Gangs establish a base in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as 'cuckooing'.

County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons; and the response to tackle it involves the police, the National Crime Agency, a wide

range of Government departments, local government agencies and VCS (voluntary and community sector) organisations. County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing, and exploitation have a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

Human trafficking and modern slavery

Human trafficking and modern slavery involve the recruitment, movement or transportation of children, who are then exploited by being forced to work or sold as a commodity. They can be trafficked for a number of reasons including sexual exploitation, benefit fraud, forced marriage, domestic servitude, forced labour in factories or agriculture, criminal activity such as pick pocketing, begging, drugs and theft. Although many are trafficked from abroad, children can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another. The Modern Slavery Act (2015) defined a child as anyone under the age of 18. As a child is not able to give informed consent, any child who is recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purposes of exploitation is considered to be a trafficking victim, whether or not they have been forced or deceived.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation is a process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism. Children and young people can be groomed online, by family members who hold extreme belief or through exposure to extremist imagery, rhetoric and writing and often do not see themselves as a victim of grooming or exploitation. Children and young people can adopt or comply with extreme views, which limits

their social interaction and engagement with their education, to young children being taken to war zones and older children being groomed for involvement.

Missing

A child or young person is considered missing if their whereabouts is unknown. They will be considered missing until located, and their wellbeing or otherwise confirmed. Missing episodes can indicate a child is being exploited and increase the likelihood they will be.

There are many reasons a child may go missing, such as, problems at home, mental health issues or living in care. Whatever the reason, the risk to those children is significant – around 7 in 10 young people who have been sexually exploited have also been reported missing (missingpeople.org).

‘Return home interviews’ are carried out by practitioners to try to understand the push and pull factors that lead individual children and young people to go missing and to seek to reduce the risk of further missing episodes.

Appendix 2: Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Delivery Plan (to be published as a separate document with link to the main strategy)

Appendix 3: Dorset Delivery Plan (to be published as a separate document with link to the main strategy)