**National Referral Mechanism Guidance – Torbay Children’s Services**

Where child trafficking victims or modern slaves are identified, Making a referral to the NRM is a statutory duty.

**Definitions and Meanings**

**The National Referral Mechanism (NRM)** is the framework through which potential victims of trafficking in the UK are identified, so that they can be supported and protected. It is a particular process to be followed when it is suspected that an adult or a child might be a victim of trafficking” (Children’s Legal Centre)

**“Human trafficking** is international organised crime, with the exploitation of human beings for profit at its heart. It is an abuse of basic rights, with organised criminals preying on vulnerable people to make money. In most cases, victims are brought to the UK from abroad, but we know that trafficking also occurs within the UK and that children in particular are increasingly vulnerable to falling victim to exploitation. “

**The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime (the ‘Palermo Protocol’) describes trafficking** as: “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” (Palerma Protocol)

**First Responders:**

In principle all agencies and organisations who find themselves with grounds for concern that a person may be a victim of human trafficking have a responsibility for identifying the person as a possible victim and putting him or her in touch with the responsible authorities and support providers.

For children, a formal referral into the NRM is made by a **first responder.**

These are:

* Local Authorities Children Services and designated persons within Safeguarding Children Boards (Child Protection Committees in Scotland)
* Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCT) (Northern Ireland)
* Home Office UK Immigration & Visas Directorate (formerly UKBA)
* Border Force
* Police
* Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA)
* Barnardo’s
* CTAC (NSPCC Child Trafficking Advice Centre)

**NRM Competent Authority:**

A Home Office service where NRM referrals are received and allocated for Reasonable Grounds’ decisions and ‘Conclusive Grounds decisions’. This service will become the main link to the referrer.

**National Guidance:**

[National Referral Mechanism: guidance for child first responders (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/233310/NRM_child_first_responders_guidance.pdf)

[National Referral Mechanism | ECPAT UK](https://www.ecpat.org.uk/national-referral-mechanism)

**Useful links (short videos)**

* [NCLCC - County Lines Awareness Video - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdYq2dhQ3qc)
* [NCLCC - National Referral Mechanism - Awareness Video - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkpXxS6dzkw)

**Link to make an electronic NRM referral:**

[Report modern slavery – GOV.UK](https://www.modernslavery.gov.uk/start)

**Notes for practice:**

Information that may indicate the need for an NRM referral can come to light at any point in assessment and/or planning with the child and their family.

All meetings which consider a child’s vulnerability to criminal and/or sexual exploitation, or children who are going missing, should consider whether an NRM referral is required.

Most of time this discussion should take place in a strategy meeting, however it may also take place in:

* MASH meetings
* Chid In Need meetings
* Cared For Children Reviews
* Child Protection Core Groups
* Stability meetings
* Contextual safeguarding peer group assessments

NRM referrals do not replace local safeguarding activity for the child(ren) or families. Safeguarding processes should still be followed.

NRM referrals do not replace any single agency or joint (with police) investigations that may need to take place.

NRM referrals do not replace police criminal investigations (whether the child is a victim or alleged perpetrator of a crime)

**Local process:**

If an NRM referral is being considered for a child who is supported at Early Help/Targeted Help level, a MASH referral should be made with parental consent. If this is not given, consideration should be given to making a referral without consent due to the nature of safeguarding concerns.

If the child is already open to social care, please follow below.

If an NRM referral is agreed as being required, this should be completed by the identified Lead Professional, supported by the Exploitation Team.

Partner agency support and information to complete the NRM referral is crucial.

The Exploitation Team will add the NRM Hazard to the child’s case record.

All NRM referrals should be accompanied by the completion of an exploitation toolkit.

**View of the child and their family**

At all points of assessment and planning with children who go missing and who are vulnerable to exploitation, the child’s views will be gathered and recorded.

The views of parents/carers/family members and siblings should also be sought and recorded as they will have vital information about the child’s vulnerability (networks/locations/patterns of behaviour)

This is no different when considering/making an NRM referral.

**Consent for children being referred to the NRM process:**

It is best practice to discuss the NRM referral with the child and their parents using non-jargon language.

Sometimes however, it may not be safe to discuss this directly with the child and/or family – the child’s safety and welfare must be paramount.

As the NRM is a national, statutory process, consent is not needed to make the referral for a child.

There is a legal duty to make NRM referrals once victims are identified.

THIS DIFFERS TO AN ADULT NRM REFERRAL WHERE CONSENT IS REQUIRED.

**Children approaching 18 years (adulthood)**

Where a child has been referred into the NRM process (with or without their consent), their CONSENT IS NEEDED to continue into the adult NRM process.

The Home Office will write to the Local Authority/Social Worker seeking confirmation that this discussion has taken place and what the individual’s views are regarding transition into the adult NRM process.

**Preparing an NRM referral (using the electronic referral system):**

The following list is not exhaustive but will assist in writing an NRM referral:

* Child’s details and history of previous addresses/local authorities in which they may have lived and been exploited
* Any nicknames or other known names for the child/family
* Chronology of events/incidents of concern which have triggered the NRM referral
* Locations that the child may have been taken to for the purposes of exploitation (as many specifics as possible)
* Associations of concern (adults/peers/networks) that may have been involved in arranging, transporting or exploiting the child)

**What happens next?**

Once the NRM referral is submitted (to the Home Office), the person completing the referral will be given a reference number. Add this to the child’s record for future reference. ­

The referral will be allocated to a competent authority within the Home Office or UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) who will acknowledge receipt of the case with the first responder.

This competent authority is now the first responder’s first point of contact in relation to the NRM referral and should be kept up to date with any developments and supplied with any information that is of relevance to the trafficking consideration.

**1st decision**: A ‘Reasonable Grounds’ decision should be made within 5 working days of the referral by the allocated competent authority. The test for this is: “I suspect but cannot prove”.

**More information needed?:** The Competent Authority decision maker may request more information or documentation relating to the child’s circumstances. A list of questions may be sent in an email.

The Social Worker (supported by the Exploitation Team) will need to respond by giving as much information as possible – this can be emailed back to the NRM duty desk (email address will be included in the request) quoting the child’s NRM reference)

**2nd decision** Will not be made before 45 days (but may take a number of months), a ‘Conclusive Grounds’ decision will be made by the Competent Authority.

**\*\*\*Letters (in email format) about both of these decisions will be sent to the referrer. They should be added to the child’s case record immediately.**

**\*\*Please note – these emails may get filtered into your JUNK INBOX – please check here**

Information relating to vulnerability re: missing and child exploitation should be reviewed in every subsequent meeting about the child.

The electronic NRM referral needs to be updated with any new/significant information or events that may affect either of these decisions.

A ‘Review Decision’ can be made if new information is shared via the NRM referral that alters the outcome of any previous decisions.

Children with NRM referrals should NOT be closed to Children’s Services, unless there is clear multi agency assessment and an agreed view that the exploitation/modern slavery concerns are mitigated.

If a child with an NRM is being stepped down from children’s social care to Early Help, or is being closed, the NRM referral must be updated using the electronic link with the reasons why and clear updated risk mitigation information.

Katie Buckley

Exploitation Team Manager – Torbay Children’s Services

December 2021