**Multi- Agency Exploitation Strategy 2019 – 2022**



**TACKLING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION TOGETHER**

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**Introduction**

This strategy has been endorsed by Sandwell Childrens Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP). Exploitation is seen as a priority for the Partnership and tackling the issues is one of the most important challenges currently facing the local authority area.

This is a 3 year strategy in which time we intend to ensure that our workforce is knowledgeable and confident in recognising and responding to all forms of exploitation, where there is a learning culture which effectively listens and considers the voice of our children, young people, adults and communities, and in tackling exploitation, involving them in service development implementing a range of resources to respond to exploitation by and where we have a range of services that are suitably resourced to .

All types of exploitation and human trafficking is abuse, perpetrators who exploit children for personal benefits or profits in Sandwell cause lasting emotional, physical and psychological harm to those they abuse and their families and communities. The document sets out clearly that the Partnership responsibility is to survivors of exploitation and their futures and to those children who may become involved in exploitative and coercive behaviours and relationships.

It is the responsibility of all partner agencies to identify all children and young people at risk of exploitation in order to prevent them from becoming victims, and it is the responsibility of all partner agencies to protect and safeguard all children who are experiencing exploitation from further harm.

Exploitation greatly impacts on the lives of victims and their families and can affect all our communities. SCSP is determined to work with partners to intervene where Exploitation is known or suspected and aims to reduce the reoccurring pattern of exploitation across the Borough. We aim to ensure that we ‘get it right’ in Sandwell and by implementing this strategy will work together and improve the responses that all agencies provide to tackle exploitation. We know that children suffer many forms of exploitation in our 6 Towns and victims are often subject of more than one form of exploitation i.e. those at risk of criminal exploitation by gangs can also be victims of sexual exploitation.

Children will not always recognise that they are being groomed for exploitation, nor will they always recognise they are being abused and for some children the abuse they experience is believed by them to be consensual and do not see themselves as victims.

Our aspiration would be to stop the exploitation of children, but recognise that it will be unlikely to completely eradicate this, however what we can and will do is to establish services, frameworks, systems and processes to reduce the likelihood for exploitation of children to occur and to put measures in place to assist us in reducing the numbers of children that are being exploited. We believe the actions contained in this strategy and our delivery plan will help us move towards that.

Whilst this strategy relates specifically to children we recognise that for some children who reach the age of 18, exploitation and trafficking does not stop, so our strategy will include the work we will undertake with our care leavers and other adult services to ensure a safe and seamless transition for those vulnerable young people requiring continuing support to other support services.

We need to ensure that our focus is on tackling and targeting those that exploit our children, as with no perpetrators there are no victims.

**PURPOSE OF CHILD EXPLOITATION STRATEGY**

For the purpose of this document, the definition agreed for use within Sandwell to define the different types of Child Exploitation are referenced **in Appendix A**

The development of this strategy reflects the continued learning journey across Sandwell and the development in our understanding of CSE and other forms of exploitation. This strategy seeks to refresh the partnership commitment to ensuring that CSE remains a key priority, whilst also acknowledging the increasing impact and recognition of Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and how this presents us with renewed challenges around how we work with children and families to tackle the contextual safeguarding risks that children face.

This strategy aims to promotes a culture whereby nobody tolerates or ignores exploitation, and where communities, families and all professionals are made aware of how to identify, report and tackle those that perpetrate exploitation, to prevent them from further abusing children, and protect those children who are abused.

To achieve this, the SCSP aim to have strong and effective multi-agency working arrangements to recognises all types of exploitation, and where:

* There is a clear understanding of the scope of the problem
* Practice is informed by national, regional and local learning, the law, policy, research and local intelligence including single and multiagency quantitative and qualitative data and information.
* Practitioners are committed, confident and competent to work with families where exploitation is known or suspected
* Children and young people who are exposed to adverse childhood experiences and other related safeguarding risks to be identified early in order that they can be effectively supported to prevent them from becoming victims of exploitation.
* Sexually and criminally exploited people must be treated as victims of abuse and

not as offenders;

* Law enforcement efforts involve disruption of sexually and criminally

exploitative activity and target offenders as sexual abusers or subject criminal

processes, who may be an adult but could also be a child’s peer and/or other young people.

**Governance**

This strategy will be managed by the child exploitation board (CEB), a sub group of SCSP. CEB is chaired by the Director of Sandwell Children Trust (SCT) and is made up of senior professionals from across the partnership.

To deliver the activities required to achieve our ambitions, this strategy is underpinned by a workplan with an associated monitoring CE Performance dataset which is managed by the CEB. The nominated members of this group consists of professional who manage and deliver frontline service, support and interventions to children and families within our communities and are therefore well placed to spot the early signs of exploitation, monitor any emerging themes, barriers and operational issues.

The chair of CEB is required to present quarterly update reports to SCSP detailing progress against the delivery plan and any risks /barriers in achieving against the strategy.

Members of the CEB will actively seek opportunities to ensure that exploitation is profiled in the work of other statutory boards through the 4 Boards membership

**Implementation and Monitoring**

SCSP will oversee the implementation and delivery of this strategy through a clear

governance structure and associated Work Plan. CEB will be responsible for

coordinating and ensuring delivery of all associated activities and progressions of the work plan.

The CEB will receive regular reports from other multi agency forums to ensure a holistic view and strong connectivity to other works being undertaken, including the Exploitation Operational Group and the activities delivered via the Exploitation Operational Hub. Following the Exploitation Operational Hub has been renamed – ‘Horizons’.

This group will require information arising from engagement and consultation with young people that use services to assist in measuring progress, this includes updates from Multiagency sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation (MASE/MACE) meetings, in particular those attended by children young people and their families, together with any theme arising from Return Home Interviews. Such information or intelligence will enable CEB to test the local processes and direct attention to areas where improvements are identified.

The CEB will also consider connect with the work of The Sandwell Youth Justice Partnership Board, which oversees Youth Offending Service activity, and have included exploitation as a key focus in the Sandwell Youth Justice Plan. Together there will be elements of co-dependence between the two Boards to ensure that all efforts are made to raise awareness of the potential for exploitation and to keep those who are being exploited out of the youth justice system, recognising that there will be occasions where those being exploited may have also committed offences which lead to their involvement with the Youth Offending Service.  This element will include the YOS cohort, influencing the criminal justice partners to broaden their understanding of, and response to, exploitation which will be of interest to the CEB. The strategy will also consider work with MST (Multi Systemic Therapy) provision who provide support to break to break the cycle of exploitation and anti-social behaviours by keeping children and young people safely at home, in school and out of trouble

The statutory safeguarding partners and relevant partners agencies are to provide data and information on its own agency performance data and quality assurance activity and contribute to the wider strategic planning and discussion relating to safeguarding children from Exploitation.

Each agency is responsible for the appointment of a member of its senior management team or leadership group to establish its own agencies accountability arrangements for ‘Exploitation’ and ensure adherence to the local multi-agency operational arrangements.

All partner agencies are responsible and will be accountable for delivering on the strategy within their own agency and in collaboration with other agencies

**What we will do**

This strategy will focus on four areas where we will focus our efforts to help us structure activities to tackle the different and connecting forms of exploitation

SCSP have identified the following four key objectives for 20/22 in line with the 4P’s, ***to Enable Sandwell to be an Exploitation***

* **Prepare -** Barriers to preventing and tackling exploitation are reduced
* **Prevent –** The risk of children being exploited is reduced through a focus on prevention and early identification
* **Protect** - Children identified as being at risk or experience harm get the right service at the right time
* **Pursue –** Perpetrators are stopped, brought to justice and are less likely to re-offend

CEB will formulate its workplan informed by local, regional and national developments and research to shape the delivery of its activities against each of the spotlight area of focus as illustrated in the table below.

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| **Overall objective to - *Prepare*** | **Overall objective to - *Prevent*** |
| Strengthen the identification and assessment of children in need, and at risk of exploitation.  Develop and use performance monitoring systems and data to strategically target the focus of operational activity | *To prevent children experiencing any issues of exploitation in the first place.*  *Prevent young people becoming at risk and raise awareness of Exploitation*  *• Identify and safeguard victims*  *• Identify and monitor vulnerable locations across the area*  *Share information across consortia* |
| *How we will achieve this* | *How we will achieve this* |
| Promote consistency between partner agencies to reported occurrences of child exploitation and report known case via the national referral mechanism.  Ensure that our risk assessment tools for identifying and assessing exploitation risks/concerns across the multi-agency workforce are well understood and embedded.  Identify the numbers and types of children experiencing or vulnerable to exploitation  Triangulate data relating to all areas of exploitation to fully understand the extent of the problem  Align strategic thinking between the local authorities four statutory consortia. (SCSP, HWBB SAB SSPPCP)  Ensure children and families no about our plans to make Sandwell Exploitation free, the services that can be accessed and will help and how they can access support | Raise awareness of all strands of exploitation across agencies, with children their families and within the wider communities  Strengthen the identification and assessment of children in need, and at risk of exploitation.  Develop and use performance monitoring systems and data to strategically target the focus of operational activity.  Engage CYPF to be part of the solution to tackle exploitation drawing on their experience to effect improvements to the multiagency safeguarding arrangements  Develop the SCSP training offer on exploitation to build confidence and competence in identification and response to exploitation |
| **Overall objective to *- Protect*** | **Overall objective to *- Pursue*** |
| *To intervene support and protect to ensure that the right service is available for child victims and adult survivors when this is required.* | *To identify, disrupt and prosecute those who are intent on exploiting children.* |
| *How we will achieve this* | *How we will achieve this* |
| Develop further the Sandwell child exploitation operational hub and establish mechanisms to manage intelligence, information sharing and risk assessment to better protect children  Improve the safeguarding of children identified to be vulnerable or at risk of exploitation and provide services to provide direct therapeutic support and improved access to specialist provision.  Work jointly with Sandwells Consortia to plan implement and review targeted services to maximise operational solutions  Empower those affected by exploitation to identify strategies to break cycles of exploitative coercive and controlling behaviours and to withdraw or exit safely | Use intelligence and data to profile and target perpetrators and bring offenders to justice.  Ensure that information and intelligence relating to victims of all forms of exploitation  and the perpetrators is shared strategical and operationally and is acted upon.  Promote the use of the disruption toolkit to maximum effect to assist investigations, restrict and manage offenders and support and safeguard victims/potential victim.  Promote the need to work together to tackle this issue amongst agencies communities and children by creating easier and safer ways for information to be shared when exploitation is suspected or known. |

Throughout our work we will communicate and develop tools to engage with, and increase public confidence in the work the partnership does to tackle exploitation and in Sandwell

**How we will do it**

This strategy is underpinned via a workplan (appendix?), which outlines what is required to move the exploitation agenda forward strategically and operationally.

The workplan details each activity to be delivered, the required timescale, and the expected outcome.

There has also been an agreed performance scorecard developed, supported by a sharing and generation of intelligence and information across the partnership to provide a focused safeguarding response.

The CEB workplan is based on partnership working, recognising the need for continual development and improvement in delivering our exploitation agenda.

**How will we know that our strategy is successful?**

* We will have delivered a communication campaign that raises awareness in Sandwell and there is evidence that our communities, families and professionals are aware of the issues and how to respond and children in Sandwell will feel protected and safe.
* That our communities, families and professionals are clear that the responsibility for

exploitation, abuse and trafficking lays with perpetrators and not child victims.

* Professional practice will improve and our plans for children who are being trafficked and exploited will be strengthened.
* There is a consistent response to exploitation and trafficking across partner agencies.
* Our Child Exploitation Performance Dataset will cover all aspects of exploitation and will be used to enable us to understand if the impact of our actions are increasing the prosecutions of those that perpetrate exploitation in Sandwell and reducing the number of victims of exploitation that are identified.
* Victims of exploitation will be offered support as they transition to adult services.

**A Safer Sandwell - Free from Exploitation will see:**

* Professionals, local businesses, families, parents, carers and children being able to identify the signs of exploitation and know how to report concerns and that all professionals are aware of their individual agencies responses to abuse.
* All children and young people having a good understanding of healthy friendships and relationships and are aware of what exploitation is.
* All exploited children who commit criminal acts, we will investigate and tackle those that force them to commit crime.
* Children and young people who are being exploited identified, safeguarded and supported for as long as they need.
* Innovate ideas being introduced to eliminate victim blaming for exploitation
* Those who seek to exploit children are identified, disrupted and convicted.
* ‘Support the local and professional community to recognise and respond to all types of exploitation and missing in a child centred way’.
* All partners being held accountable to the SCSP for its contribution to this area of our priority and the overall vision and values for all children in Sandwell.

**SCSP Vision and Values**

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| **“Our vision is for all children to be safe at home and in their communities, where they are loved, cared for and have the stability to grow healthily and to achieve their ambition”.** |

The values that underpin our vision are:

a) We will put children at the heart of what we do

b) Together we will make Sandwell safer for children

c) We will always listen, believe, learn, and improve

d) We will have respect for each other and recognise and respond positively to difference

e) We will be positive about the future, and have aspirations for Sandwell’s children, be solution focused, committed and innovative.

f) We are going to make a difference!

The long term aim in Sandwell is to make the borough safe and free from all forms of Exploitation.

APPENDIX A

1. **Definitions and Types of Child Exploitation**

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| **In Sandwell a child is seen to be exploited or at risk of exploitation if they are subject to any of the defined exploitative conditions set out in this strategy relating to Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, Children who go Missing, Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, Labour Exploitation Gang related activity and County Lines.**  **Exploitation in any of these conditions 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 form of abusive 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 coercive behaviours - violence or the threat of violence.**  **The victim may have been exploited even if the activity appears to be consensual.**  **NB. Principle 1 - Children cannot consent to their own abuse**  ***(Adapted from Home Office Definition of Child Criminal Exploitation)*** |

* 1. The exploitation of children is multifaceted and tackling this issue is a complex task facing local authorities across the UK. It is imperative that in recognising Child Exploitation as a priority, it is co-considered alongside Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, children who go missing, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Criminal Exploitation, including Gangs and County Lines as they are all intrinsically linked.
  2. The Home Office definition for Child Criminal Exploitation has been provides a robust framework to establish the parameters for this strategy.

*“****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 the 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 also occur through the use of technology.” (Home Office September 2018)*

* 1. For the purposes of this strategy Sandwell Childrens Safeguarding Partnership has utilised the above definition to set out its framework for the multi-agency response to identify and protect children who are subject to different types of Exploitation.
  2. Set out below are the various definitions relating to the types of exploitation offender’s use to coerce children (and adults) which may place them at risk.
  3. ***Modern Slavery -*** Modern Slavery is a term used to encapsulate both offences in the Modern Slavery Act: slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour; and human trafficking. Numerous pieces of legislation have been introduced that make reference to, and directly tackle, modern slavery. *See Appendix A for a more detailed list of the forms of Modern Slavery being perpetrated.*
  4. Anyone can become a victim of modern slavery – any age, race or gender. Modern slaves are sold like objects, forced to work for little or no pay, live in fear and squalor, have their freedom restricted and are at the mercy of their employers.
  5. The Modern Slavery Act 2015 places a duty on local authorities, including services that are commissioned to give due regard to support people who are drawn into modern slavery in which people are exploited.
  6. Practitioners need to be mindful that children who are criminally exploited should be seen as victims and not treated as criminals. They should also be treated through the lens of modern slavery and child safeguarding legislation and practice.
  7. ***Human Trafficking*** - A person commits an offence if they arrange or facilitate the travel of another person with a view to that person being exploited. A person may arrange or facilitate travel by recruiting, transporting, transferring, harbouring or receiving the victim, or by transferring or exchanging control over them. This includes internal trafficking, such as transporting or transferring victims by car, taxis, or public transport to towns across the country. It is irrelevant whether the victim consents to the travel, whether they are an adult or a child.
  8. Any child (0-17 years) who is recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purposes of exploitation is considered to be a trafficking victim. Children can be trafficked in order to be exploited for the purpose of:
     + - Sex work.
       - Domestic servitude.
       - Sweatshop and restaurant work.
       - Credit card fraud.
       - Begging or pick pocketing.
       - Tending plants in illegal cannabis farms.
       - Benefit fraud.
       - Drug mules, drug dealing or decoys for adult drug traffickers.
       - Adoption.
       - Organ harvesting
       - Forced marriage
  9. ***Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)*** – is defined within working Together 2018 as

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| |  | | --- | | 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. | |

* 1. A person under 18 is sexually exploited when they are coerced, manipulated or forced into

sexual activities by an individual for their own or someone else’s benefit. A young person

would be classed as a victim of trafficking if they are moved from one location to another for

the purposes of sexual exploitation. It can occur anywhere within the UK, across local authority boundaries and across international borders. It is important to highlight that any child may be at risk of CSE, whilst there are ‘higher risk’ groups of children who may be more susceptible to being groomed for a range of reasons, any child may be groomed and exploited.

* 1. While some survivors who were groomed as children continue to be abused as adults, others

are at risk to exploitation and abuse starting in young adulthood often as a result of having

learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health problems, substance misuse issues or

because they are vulnerable in other ways.

* 1. Sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without immediate recognition;

for example, being persuaded to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones without

immediate payment or gain.

* 1. In all cases, those exploiting have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect,

physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Violence, coercion and intimidation

are common, involvement in exploitative relationships being characterised in the main by

limited availability of choice resulting from social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability.

* 1. Child Sexual Exploitation can include activity such as:
     + 1. *Peer on peer*

This refers to situations where children are forced or coerced into sexual activity by peers or associates. This can but not always be linked to gang activity.

* + - 1. *Inappropriate relationships*

This usually involves one perpetrator who has inappropriate power or control over a child (physical, emotional or financial) – one indicator could be a significant age gap or a person in a position of authority exploiting a child. The child may believe they are in a loving relationship.

* + - 1. Gang associated CSE

A child can be sexually exploited by a gang, but this is not necessarily the reason why gangs are formed. Types of exploitation may include using sex as a weapon between rival gangs, as a form of punishment to fellow gang members and/or a means of initiation into a gang.

* + - 1. Organised/networked sexual exploitation or trafficking

Young people (often connected) are passed through networks, possibly over geographical distances, between towns and cities whereby they may be forced/coerced into sexual activity with multiple men. Often this occurs at ‘parties’ and young people who are involved may recruit others into the network. Some of this activity is described as serious organised crime and can involve the organised ‘bullying and selling’ of young people by offenders. Organised exploitation varies from spontaneous networking between groups of perpetrators to more serious organised crime where children are effectively sold.

It is important to recognise that any of the models detailed can utilise technology in a variety of ways and means. Exploitation varies from spontaneous networking between groups of perpetrators to more serious organised crime where children are effectively sold.

* + - 1. *Boyfriend model*

The perpetrator will befriend and groom a child into a ‘relationship’ and will then coerce or force them to have sex with friends or associates. The ‘boyfriend’ may be significantly older than the victim but this is not always the case.

* 1. ***Gangs including County Lines -*** In cases of criminal exploitation and gang affiliation we know that powerful, adult gang members recruit and arrange or facilitate the travel of children, young people (and vulnerable adults) for the purpose of them selling drugs, firearms or sex on their behalf. This is exploitation and can fall under the Modern Slavery Act’s definitions of exploitation as:
     + - Sexual exploitation
       - Securing services etc. by force, threats or deception
       - Securing services etc. from children and vulnerable persons
  2. It is important to note that perpetrators of criminal exploitation may themselves be children, young people or vulnerable adults who are criminally exploited, and the victims of criminal exploitation may also be at risk of becoming perpetrators.
  3. *County Lines* As set out in the Serious Violence Strategy, published by the Home Office, is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.
  4. ***Missing*** ***from home, care and education –*** Children missing from care, home and education is when a child has gone missing or whose whereabouts cannot be established. A child may run away from school, their home or care placement, or may be forced or lured to leave.
  5. *The College of Policing definition:*
     + Anyone whose whereabouts cannot be established will be considered as missing until located and their well-being or otherwise confirmed.
  6. *The Department for Education definition:*
     + Missing Child: a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.
  7. *Missing from care:*
     + a looked after child who is not at their placement or the place they are expected to be (e.g. school) and their whereabouts is not known.
  8. There are links between gang involvement and children going missing from school, home or care. Girls are more likely to be reported missing than boys. Girls who go missing from home of care are also more likely to get an appropriate response from police forces. According to The Children’s Society, boys aged 14 to17 are mostly targeted for criminal exploitation, where gangs deliberately groom and traffick a child to carry out tasks.
  9. The Children's Society has identified differences in patterns of missing episodes can relate to the different forms of exploitation children may experience. For example, they observed that on average, boys went missing for two weeks, whereas girls went missing for two to three days, perhaps corresponding with boys being trafficked around the UK in their potential involvement in County Lines.
  10. In all circumstances when a child goes missing or runs away they are at increased risk of exploitation.