

SANDWELL MULTI-AGENCY CHILD EXPLOITATION STRATEGY 2022-2025



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TACKLING CHILD EXPLOITATION TOGETHER

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Introduction

This strategy has been written by the Child Exploitation Board (CEB) a subgroup of Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) the local statutory group for ensuring that there are clear and concise multi-agency safeguarding arrangements underpinned by effective procedures and processes that are applicable to all partners in Sandwell to safeguard children, young people from harm caused by exploitation from within their family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives.

The scope of this strategy covers all the domains of child exploitation as outlined in appendix A, recognising that threats in relation to child exploitation can take a variety of different forms, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups; trafficking; online abuse; modern slavery; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation.

It is important to acknowledge and emphasise that whilst this strategy relates specifically to children; by definition up to the age of 18, we recognise that for children who reach the age of 18, exploitation and trafficking does not stop. Therefore, this strategy and the activities undertaken work, post 18 to ensure a safe and seamless transition for those vulnerable young people requiring continuing support to adult support services.

Child Exploitation remains a priority area for the SCSP, with the mandate and activities directed and progress through the CEB who have together agreed this 3-year strategy which reflects on our journey, learning and developmental activities so far. This Strategy is not meant to be a definitive and static document but will evolve as we work more closely with partners, locally, regionally and nationally and learn from evidence-based practice, including the voices and experiences of children, young people, families communities and our frontline practitioners whilst also refreshing the partnership commitments.

Through the work undertaken to date to understand the profile of exploitation here in Sandwell, across the region and also wider afield, it is increasingly recognised that all forms of exploitation take place irrespective of social class, race and ethnicity, gender, urban and rural areas. However, it is also widely recognised that perpetrators are more likely to target children and young people who are more vulnerable due to social, economic or emotional factors.

We know that 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.

As with other areas of child protection, identifying and responding early to indicators of exploitation is the responsibility of all agencies and early appropriate intervention is crucial to reduce the likelihood /exposure and risks of becoming victims of exploitation. Professionals working with young people are well placed to identify risks at an early stage and through the work of the CEB this 22 -25 Strategy aims to ensure Sandwell has a knowledgeable, skilled and confident workforce to identify and respond to the vulnerabilities and risk indicators of child exploitation.

We want to ensure there is a culture in Sandwell which demonstrably listens and considers the voice's and experiences of our children, young people, adults and communities, to tackle exploitation, and can evidence their involvement in service development, including the shaping of the local offer and resources on the basis of the local need and profile.

The collective aspiration across Sandwell's partners would be to stop the exploitation of children, however we do recognise that it will be unlikely to completely eradicate this, so we have agreed to do all we can to make it as difficult as possible for perpetrators to exploit children in Sandwell. To do this, 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.

We will be establishing multi-agency services, frameworks, systems and processes and consistently testing out the effectiveness of our arrangements in reducing the exploitation of children. The pathways in place will assist us in reducing the numbers of children that are being exploited through early identification and swift multi-agency early help.

We believe the actions contained in this strategy and our delivery plan will help us move towards that.

Purpose of Child Exploitation Strategy

This strategy aims to promote 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 that recognise 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 regardless of any links to offending
- Law enforcement efforts involve disruption of sexually and criminally exploitative activity and target offenders as sexual abusers or subject them to criminal processes; who may be an adult but could also be a child's peer and/or other young people.

Governance Arrangements

This strategy will be managed by the child exploitation board (CEB), a sub group of SCSP. The Child Exploitation Board is chaired by the Head of Service Sandwell Childrens Trust and is made up of senior professionals from across the partnership. The Head of Service has delegated authority from the Chief Executive Officer as the Exploitation Sponsor, to take this strategy forwards with the partnership.

To deliver the activities required to achieve our ambitions, this strategy is underpinned by a workplan with an associated monitoring Child Exploitation (CE) Performance dataset which is managed by the CEB. The nominated members of this group consist of professionals 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. Some of the key actions in this Work Plan will feed into Sandwell's wider Prevention of Violence and Exploitation and Reducing Offending and Reoffending Strategies and Plans, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of this work and our joined up holistic approach.

In line with the SCSP Constitution, the Chair of CEB produce and presents quarterly update reports to SCSP detailing progress against the delivery plan and any risks /barriers in achieving against the strategy.

Working Together

The work of the CEB encompasses and aligns to the that of other local statutory partnership Boards, including; Sandwell Safer Partnership, the Safeguarding Adults Board and the Children and Families Strategic Partnership. Together they have recognised that to address exploitation in Sandwell, multi-faceted work is required that is well coordinated, joined-up and driven assertively.

By this, all agencies are individually and collectively responsible for ensuring our children and young people and vulnerable adults are safeguarded against violence and exploitation. The CEB will work closely and connect with other groups and partnerships boards in all aspects of our work.

Implementation and Monitoring Arrangements

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 Child Exploitation (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 and connect with the work of The Sandwell Youth Justice Partnership Board, which oversees Youth Justice 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 the cycle of exploitation and anti-social behaviours by keeping children and young people safely at home, in school and out of trouble.

The CEB will also consider and connect with work to be developed on Sexual Assault and Abuse. Sandwell Sexual Assault & Abuse (SAAS) Strategy has been developed and aligns with the West Midlands Sexual Assault & Abuse Strategy 2020-2023 (currently under consultation at the time of updating this strategy in March 2022). It also reflects the priorities in the national Strategic Direction for Sexual Assault & Abuse Services: Lifelong Care for Victims & Survivors 2018-2023. The Sandwell SAAS Strategy is governed through the Sexual Assault & Abuse subgroup which sits under DASP. Whilst this is in its early stages the overlap of prevention in education work has been identified as an area that may overlap with and have connections to the Child

Exploitation Strategy; Domestic Abuse Strategy; Prevention of Violence & Exploitation Strategy as well as Child and Adult Safeguarding arrangements. Members across boards will identify any further areas of overlap and ensure workplans are aligned through communication and updates across subgroups.

The statutory safeguarding partners and relevant partner 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. Any member in attendance will have strategic decision-making ability or the delegated authority to make decisions that inform plans to move forward with the work plan and strategy.

There is a devised performance indicator dashboard that capture's multiagency data set that give CEB members greater oversight of those areas identified as particular vulnerabilities and the impact of interventions to address exploitations action the multi-agency landscape. This is collected and presented to members to monitor, scrutinise and hold each other accountable to influence change and identify priorities that become apparent through this process.

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 22/25 in line with the 4P's,

- **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 areas of focus as illustrated in the table on the next page.

| Overall objective to - Prepare | Overall objective to - Prevent |
|--|---|
| <p>Strengthen the identification and assessment of children in need, and at risk of exploitation.</p> <p>Develop and use performance monitoring systems and data to strategically target the focus of operational activity.</p> | <p><i>To prevent children experiencing any issues of exploitation in the first place.</i></p> <p><i>Prevent young people becoming at risk and raise awareness of Exploitation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identify and safeguard victims</i> • <i>Identify and monitor vulnerable locations across the area</i> <p><i>Share information across consortia</i></p> |
| <i>How we will achieve this</i> | <i>How we will achieve this</i> |
| <p>Promote consistency between partner agencies to reported occurrences of child exploitation and report known cases via the national referral mechanism.</p> <p>Ensure that our risk assessment tools for identifying and assessing exploitation risks/concerns across the multi-agency workforce are well understood and embedded.</p> <p>Identify the numbers and types of children experiencing or vulnerable to exploitation</p> <p>Triangulate data relating to all areas of exploitation to fully understand the extent of the problem</p> <p>Align strategic thinking between the local authorities four statutory consortia. (SCSP, HWBB SAB SSPPCP)</p> <p>Ensure children and families know about our plans to make Sandwell Exploitation free, the services that can be accessed and will help and how they can access support</p> | <p>Raise awareness of all strands of exploitation across agencies, with children, their families and within the wider communities.</p> <p>Strengthen the identification and assessment of children in need, and at risk of exploitation.</p> <p>Develop and use performance monitoring systems and data to strategically target the focus of operational activity.</p> <p>Engage CYPF to be part of the solution to tackle exploitation drawing on their experience to effect improvements to the multiagency safeguarding arrangements</p> <p>Develop the SCSP training offer on exploitation to build confidence and competence in identification and response to exploitation.</p> |
| Overall objective to - Protect | Overall objective to - Pursue |
| <p><i>To intervene, support and protect to ensure that the right service is available for child victims and adult survivors when this is required.</i></p> | <p><i>To identify, disrupt and prosecute those who are intent on exploiting children.</i></p> |
| <i>How we will achieve this</i> | <i>How we will achieve this</i> |
| <p>Develop further the Sandwell child exploitation operational hub and establish mechanisms to manage intelligence, information sharing and risk assessment to better protect children</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Work jointly with Sandwell's Consortia to plan implement and review targeted services to maximise operational solutions</p> <p>Empower those affected by exploitation to identify strategies to break cycles of exploitative coercive and controlling behaviours and to withdraw or exit safely</p> | <p>Use intelligence and data to profile and target perpetrators and bring offenders to justice.</p> <p>Ensure that information and intelligence relating to victims of all forms of exploitation and the perpetrators is shared strategically and operationally and is acted upon.</p> <p>Promote the use of the disruption toolkit to maximum effect to assist investigations, restrict and manage offenders and support and safeguard victims/potential victim.</p> <p>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.</p> |

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 in Sandwell.

Sandwell is a member of the Contextual Safeguarding Local Authority Interest Network (LAIN) leading and championing the work devised by expert Carlene Firmin. With champions across the multi-agency landscape committed to working in partnership to promote and support Sandwell's partnership in understanding how they can approach and respond to the young persons experiences of significant harm beyond their families. Joining together to do so through the CEB partners will help monitor, improve and assure safeguarding practice and arrangements to tackle exploitation are of best practice.

How we will do it

This strategy is underpinned via a workplan, which outlines what is required to move the exploitation agenda forward strategically and operationally, this will include transition pathways.

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.

The CEB workplan will capture learning recommendations from local and national CSPR's, with members driving forward actions and being held accountable to ensure Sandwell's response is enough. More recently, through CEB a self-assessment action plan was the outcome of the National Panels CSPR published in March 2020 'It was hard to escape'. Sandwell were able to correlate areas already included within the workplan to have the evidence to satisfy the response.

Within SCSP Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) that includes Child Exploitation as a priority area. Within the QAF are outcomes for condensed version of activities that will be undertaken across the partnership to show how outcomes will be address, the measures of success and available performance data to inform deeper understanding as set out in the implementation plan.

See outcome table on next page:

| Quantity: How well we keep children safe | Quality: How consistently we do so? | Outcome: Is Anyone Better Off? | Sources of Information and reporting schedule |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Exploitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of children being exploited/at risk of exploitation • Number of National Referral Mechanisms submitted • Number of 'reachable moment' interventions offered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children who are being exploited/at risk of exploitation attend full time education • Intelligence is shared by partner agencies to identify children who are vulnerable to being exploited | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in repeat missing episodes • Increase in children who say they feel safe in their school/community • Perpetrators are disrupted/held to account/prosecuted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people's survey • Performance data • Horizons Team annual report |

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.
- CEB members will listen to the child's voice within board meetings to shape and influence decision making at senior level

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

"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

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)

- 1.1. 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.
- 1.2. The Home Office definition for Child Criminal Exploitation 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)
- 1.3. 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.
- 1.4. Set out below are the various definitions relating to the types of exploitation offenders use to coerce children (and adults) which may place them at risk.
- 1.5. **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.

- 1.6. 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.
- 1.7. 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.
- 1.8. 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.
- 1.9. **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.
- 1.10. 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
- 1.11. **Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)** – is defined within working Together 2018 as

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.

- 1.12. 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.

- 1.13. 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.
- 1.14. 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.
- 1.15. 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.
- 1.16. Child Sexual Exploitation can include activity such as:
 - a) 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.
 - b) 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.
 - c) 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.
 - d) 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.

e) *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.

1.17. **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

1.18. 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.

1.19. *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.

1.20. **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.

1.21. *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.

1.22. *The Department for Education definition:*

- Missing Child: a child reported as missing to the police by their family or carers.

1.23. *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.

1.24. 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 to 17 are mostly targeted for criminal exploitation, where gangs deliberately groom and traffic a child to carry out tasks.

- 1.25. 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.
- 1.26. In all circumstances when a child goes missing or runs away they are at increased risk of exploitation.