



Child Exploitation Strategy

2023 - 2025



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Introduction

This document outlines the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Partnership (TWSCP) strategy for preventing, identifying and responding to child exploitation, setting out how all agencies will work together to ensure the most effective and coordinated response in our determination to tackle child exploitation in Telford and Wrekin. It has drawn on evidence of effective practice from national and local research, policy and guidance. It has also taken into account the learning and recommendations from the Telford Council commissioned Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation report published 2022.

Traditionally, safeguarding services were developed and structured to address familial risk. Children's needs and experiences are very different as they get older. Risks outside the home or family become more relevant. Abusers often use alcohol, drugs, actual or threatened violence, kindness and affection to develop a connection with a child they intend to exploit. The manipulation at the core of exploitation is often as a result of an imbalance of power.

As children grow, they invariably become involved in social networks, relationships and environments outside of their family network. The majority of children do this in a safe and fulfilling way. However, all children can encounter individuals who seek to exploit their vulnerability or environments that exposes them to risk of harm. These environments and relationships can often serve to undermine and disempower parents and carers in the lives of children.

Understanding contexts relevant to the daily lived experience of our children and young people is key to reducing risk and improving outcomes. Therefore, this strategy is underpinned by a contextual safeguarding approach (developed by Dr Carlene Firmin, University of Bedfordshire's and Durham's University Contextual Safeguarding Network) to understand and respond to young people's experiences of harm beyond their families set in contexts and relationships where such harm occurs.

It is also important to recognise that it is not possible to tackle children and young people's vulnerability, risk and harm with child based work only. The disruption and pursuit of those people and places thought to be a risk to children; and the mechanisms by which we identify, and coordinate are critical. In addition to this **Section 6** sets out the Four P's approach – **Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue**. Our collective efforts must span these areas to ensure we secure the best outcomes for our children and young people – and not work in isolation.

Where young people are moving into adulthood it is important that we as a partnership provide transition support to ensure those who remain vulnerable have access to services and networks that can continue to engage and support them.

Aims

In delivering this strategy we aim to:

- Embed a reviewed shared set of partnership principles for working with children and young people.
- Strengthen partnership with family members/carers to support engagement in joint protection and management of risk
- Enhance our collective understanding of what is meant by 'risk outside of the home'
- Develop further our partnership shared pathways to be able to deliver a contextual safeguarding system approach to tackle child exploitation.

Scope

There is no one single definition of Child Exploitation. It is acknowledged that there are many different forms of child exploitation, however the two significant forms of Child Sexual Exploitation and Child Criminal Exploitation, are used for the purposes of this strategy. It is also acknowledged that there are clear links between child exploitation and those children who go missing and it is also noted that these issues cannot be addressed alone or in isolation from other related safeguarding issues where a child may be experiencing harm.

Child Sexual Exploitation is defined by the UK Government 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 want, 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.”

[Child sexual exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/child-sexual-exploitation-definition-and-guide-for-practitioners)

Child Criminal Exploitation is defined by the UK Government as:

“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.”

Child Criminal Exploitation is commonly associated with County Lines, but it can go beyond this to include, for example, children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft.

“County Lines 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 forms 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.”

[Serious Violence Strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/serious-violence-strategy)

[Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines)

Consultation

Development of this strategy has included consultation with:

- Young People engaging with CATE (a group of young people known to be at risk from exploitation)
- Telford & Wrekin’s Young People’s Forum (a group of young people not known to be at risk from exploitation)
- Parents consulted are parents and carers of young people who are known to be vulnerable to exploitation.

We would like to offer our appreciation to all the young people and parents/carers who took the time to talk to us, their valuable contributions have helped to shape this strategy and endorses a strategy based upon a contextual safeguarding approach.

We found that the young people known to be at risk of harm from exploitation focussed very much upon locations and safety within their communities saying young people need warm safe environments to ‘hang out’ where there are community activities available for all and known trusted adults to talk to when needed.

The Young People’s forum feedback also supported the importance of this, however, their main focus was the importance of education around different types of relationships you have as you grow older to better equip them to navigate through this and for education about exploitation in all its different forms and for this awareness to commence at an earlier age (primary).

Parents/Carers feedback was a mixture of comments above from both groups. Some parents would like to have opportunity to meet others in the community who were facing similar issues. They felt poverty in families and within localities went hand in hand with increasing the vulnerability for young people (boredom, peer pressure and lack of money to buy things) as did exclusion of children from mainstream educational provision.

These are some of the words our young people who are currently engaged with our Council's CATE (Children at Risk from Exploitation) Team have defined child exploitation to mean to them.



Telford and Wrekin: The Place

Located to the west of the Birmingham/Black Country conurbation, the borough of Telford and Wrekin is one of the fastest growing areas outside of the South East of England. Between the 2011 and 2021 census the population grew by 19,000 to 185,842. One in five of the population are aged 0 to 15 with 24% of this cohort being from an ethnic minority background.

The borough is prosperous, attractive place to live. There is a growing, local economy, with a core focus on manufacturing and below national unemployment. Telford has a developed green network of pathways and open spaces.

Whilst on face value is a prosperous, attractive place live, there are, however, significant pockets of deprivation with 18 of the borough 108 neighbourhoods ranked amongst the 10% deprived in England. Deprivation and poverty create additional challenges for parents and carers which is evident in the high number of referrals with regard to "neglect" made to the Safeguarding Partnership's multi-agency safeguarding hub, Family Connect.

Child Exploitation in Telford and Wrekin

We recognise that as with many other areas across the UK there are children and young people in the borough who are being exploited. In the year 2020/23 724 contacts with CE indicators were made to Family Connect, our multi-agency safeguarding hub. These contacts accounted for 5.6% of all contacts to Family Connect. Most of these contacts, 433, were referred to another agency for support

with another 86 provided with information and advice. A total of 114 progressed as a referral to either CATE or statutory safeguarding services. Whilst only a relatively small proportion of all CE contacts into our Family Connect go on to a service referral, it demonstrates that partners and practitioners are aware of indicators of CE and understand how to report them. This is essential if we are going to tackle CE and safeguard those at risk and prosecute offenders.

In 2018, it was agreed that the Council would commission a judge-led independent inquiry into historic child sexual exploitation (“CSE”) within the Borough and, further to this agreement, the Council engaged international law firm Eversheds Sutherland in January 2019 to act as an Independent Commissioning Body to appoint an independent Chair of the Inquiry. The Independent Chair, Tom Crowther KC, was appointed in July 2019 and his work commenced shortly thereafter.

The appointment of the Independent Chair of the Inquiry was carried out through joint working between a cross-party group of elected Members and survivors. This group also agreed the terms of reference for the Inquiry.

On 12 July 2022, the Independent Chair of the Inquiry published his report which contained 47 recommendations and 148 specific actions. Strategic partners have committed to work to implement all of the recommendations by December 2023.

This refresh of this CE strategy is an important part of the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Children Board’s response to the recommendations and will ensure that our strategy is as effective as it can be and informed by best practice.

Principles underpinning our strategy

- Safety and welfare of the child at the heart of everything we do.
- Child exploitation is child abuse and children do not make informed choices to enter or remain in exploitative situations
- Identification and risk assessment should be indicator based and not reliant on evidence
- Children who are victims of any form of exploitation will be treated as victims of abuse and their needs carefully assessed
- Education is key to providing children with the tools to identify unhealthy relationships, to raise awareness to spot signs of exploitation and report concern for them and their peers
- The law enforcement response will be directed at perpetrators who groom children for exploitation
- Challenge assumptions, bias and language used that can lead to poorer outcomes for some young people.
- Liaise with neighbouring authorities to promote effective information sharing and partnership working

- A recognition that vulnerability to exploitation does not cease for children when legal age of adulthood is reached. Transition points through childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Our Values

We will:

- ❖ Work together with children and young people and their families in a partnership culture of inclusion, understanding and empathy.
- ❖ Take ownership and accountability – Safeguarding is a continuum of activity and effort and is everybody's business.

[Child Exploitation Language Guide | The Children's Society \(childrensociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/child-exploitation-language-guide)

[Partnering with Prevention | The Children's Society \(childrensociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/partnering-with-prevention)

Our Operating Framework

Contextual Safeguarding

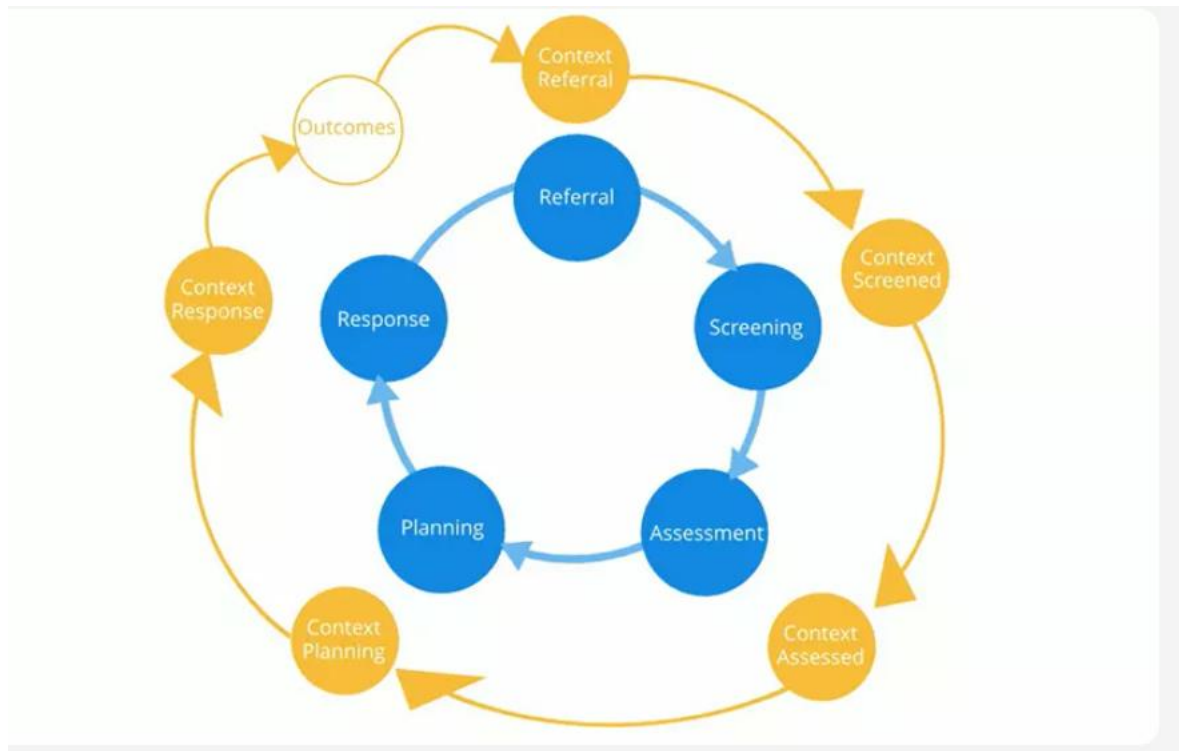
As mentioned previously in this document contextual safeguarding developed by Dr Firim at the University of Bedfordshire and Durham is an emerging approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of harm beyond their families. We, as a partnership adopted this approach in 2019 and have developed our child exploitation partnership pathway and practice accordingly, informed by the guidance and resources set out in the University of Durham's Contextual Safeguarding Network.

This was the first step for our partnership in the development of a Contextual Safeguarding System. To continue with this work in order to fully embrace the continuing developing contextual safeguarding system approach simultaneously more than one level of operational response is needed along with the necessary changes to systems and approaches.

Level 1: Safeguarding Responses focussed and centred upon working with an individual child/young person pulling out extra familial contexts at every stage of this process of referral, assessment, planning and response.

Level 2: Safeguarding responses focussed on responding to harm in contexts (locations and groups)

This level identifies, assesses, plans and intervenes with locations and groups within which young people are at risk of harm. It can include for example location mapping, peer mapping, perpetrator mapping, context mapping - school and community.



(With thanks to the Contextual Safeguarding University of Durham, National Scale –Up Toolkit, 2020)

Each level should support the other. **Level 1** should identify contexts in need of attention and this information informs **level 2**. Work undertaken at level 2 can support reduction of harm at **level 1**.

Information gained through data and analysis from across the partnership and alongside consultation with young people and their families will identify themes and patterns and inform ongoing strategic priorities. These two levels of response support the strengthening of a contextual safeguarding system and underpin our 4 key strategic themes.

Key Strategic Themes

Understand and Identify (Prepare)

Overall objective

To ensure that we have effective and well established information sharing and risk assessment mechanisms in place to understand and identify those at risk of or experiencing any issues of exploitation.

We will do this by:

- Using national and regional data to understand emerging threats and themes. This will enable us to plan and address emerging concerns.
- Use partnership data to understand what, where, and who poses a risk to communities and children at both a strategic and operational level. This will help us to target interventions at an early stage where children are especially vulnerable.
- Analyse information and intelligence gained through the delivery of a context referral and assessment and response system.
- Gain the views of children, young people, and parents/carers.
- Build upon our relationship and partnership working with neighbouring local authorities to share intelligence, information, learning and good practice.
- Ensure there is clear governance and partner responsibility throughout our multi-agency Child Exploitation pathway.
- Ensure through regular review our Child Exploitation pathway remains fit for purpose in responding to children at risk of harm from exploitation.

Prevention (Prevent)

Overall objective

To prevent children and young people experiencing any risk of harm due to exploitation in the first place.

We will do this by:

- Ongoing promotion of children and young people's safety by increasing the awareness and understanding of children, young people, parents/carers, professionals and members of the public of the risks and threats that exist in our communities
- Work together with our existing partnership arrangements to address risk and vulnerability ie Community Safety Partnership/Safer Stronger.
- Provide information and tools to support the identification of indicators of different forms of exploitation.
- Prevent children and young people from child exploitation through effective leadership, governance and a wider culture embedded within organisations and communities that recognises the root causes of child exploitation.

Intervene and support (Protect)

Overall objective

To work together across the partnership to provide support to exploited children, so they are helped, protected and listened to and that perpetrators are held to account for their action.

We will do this by:

- Developing a Contextual Safeguarding System by extending our current CE pathways to include context assessment and planning processes.
- Develop further and embed transition pathways from children's services to adult support services for those young people who remain at risk from exploitation and who will require ongoing support in adulthood.
- Ensure that the workforce is aware of their duty (Modern Slavery Act 2015 s52) to use the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to refer children or young people who they suspect are a victim of slavery and/or trafficking.

We will ensure that that training, pathways and monitoring arrangements are in place to assist and support this duty.

Disrupt and bring to justice

Overall objective

To identify, disrupt and prosecute those who are intent in exploiting children

How we will achieve this:

- Produce a regular multiagency exploitation profile including victims, perpetrator and hot spots to inform our collective response and interventions.
- Promote the use of the disruption toolkit, including use of civil orders, to maximise effect to assist investigations, restrict and manage offenders and support and safeguard children and young people.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-exploitation-disruption-toolkit/child-exploitation-disruption-toolkit-accessible>

Scrutiny and Oversight

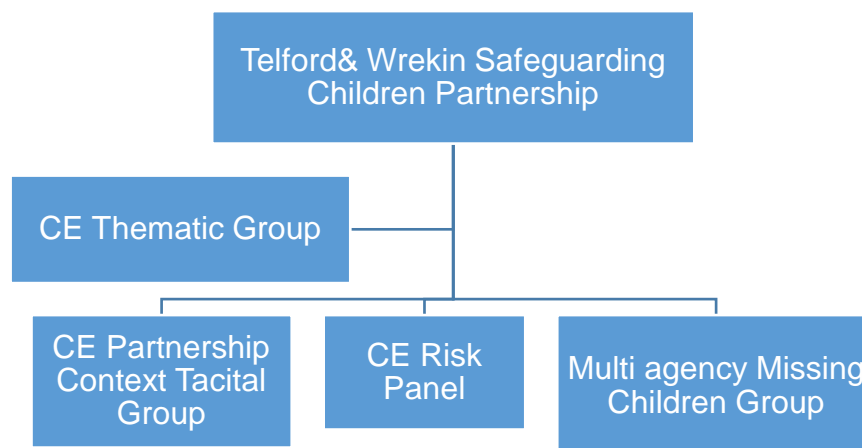
Overall objective

To evidence that the strategy is making a positive difference to the safety and welfare of children in Telford and Wrekin.

How we will achieve this:

- At each child exploitation subgroup interrogation of data relating to missing, exploited and trafficked children. This to be reported into the Safeguarding Children Board. To understand what is happening in the system.
- Develop a specific quality assurance framework which can target any point of the child exploitation pathway and associated activities. This will include a programme of auditing using a variety of methods such as dip sampling and MACFAs.
- Findings and learning to be channelled into organisational quality assurance groups and the Child Exploitation Thematic Group and Safeguarding Partnership meetings.
- Analysis of outcomes for individual young people will inform whether their circumstances have improved
- We will identify methods of consultation with children and young people and their parents/carers – gaining their views in regard to their experience and understanding.

Governance



The Telford and Wrekin Children Safeguarding Partnership is responsible for our multi agency arrangements to tackle the exploitation of children and young people in Telford. As a partnership we are committed to safeguarding children together.

The Child Exploitation Thematic Group is responsible for maintaining an overview of the multi-agency working in relation to child exploitation.

This group is also responsible for implementing this strategy through a child exploitation work plan which they will manage. Progress reports will be provided to the TWSCP at each meeting.

The CE Partnership Context Tactical Group chaired by the police brings together professionals from across the partnership to be able to assess and plan and respond to harm in contexts (location and groups)

The CE Risk Panel is chaired by a Children Services Manager considers individual children's risk assessments and creates support plans to reduce harm. This meeting also shares intelligence and identifies pattern and themes of concern.

The Multi Agency Missing Children Group considers children who go missing from home or care, plans for safety and support for individual children, analyses missing children data identifying patterns and themes and reports to the CE Thematic Group. Monitors Return Home Interviews quality and timeliness.