



Child Exploitation Practice Guidance

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PART A

Child exploitation is when children and young people are encouraged, trapped, forced or persuaded into carrying out acts for someone else's gain, often accompanied by violence or threats of violence. This may be on behalf of an adult but can be for another child/young person. Child exploitation is a tactic which can be used by organised crime groups. It often involves the child/young person being offered something in return which may include gifts, money, affection and protection. Exploitation can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. Exploitation can still occur, even where the activity appears consensual.

Exploitation can take one or many different forms and there are overlaps between them. A child/young person may be exploited sexually, or exploited criminally through selling and/or trafficking drugs, money laundering, weapons storage or the 'cuckooing' of property (e.g., for cannabis cultivation), or they may be exploited through use of their labour and other forms of modern slavery. They could also be exploited through radicalisation. Victims may be subjected to more than one form of exploitation; therefore, it is important that professionals are able to recognise and address multiple forms of exploitation.

Working Together 2018 makes it clear that a child centred approach is fundamental to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of every child. A child centred approach means keeping the child in focus when making decisions about their lives and working in partnership with them and their families. The welfare of children is paramount and that they are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary.

Whatever the form of abuse or neglect, professionals should put the needs of children first when determining what action to take.

All children and young people are vulnerable to exploitation and it can affect any person regardless of age, gender, social or ethnic background. Exploitation of children/young people requires a wider perspective and understanding of the contexts, situations and relationships in which exploitation is likely to occur. It is important to remember that anyone being exploited is a victim, and although they may not recognise this, as professionals we should refrain from 'blaming' or holding them to account.

A child is defined as any person who is under 18 years of age. However, some young people up to age 25 have specific vulnerabilities that may place them at greater harm (e.g. learning difficulties and disabilities or being a care leaver) and as such, they may be considered in relation to exploitation.

The aims and purpose of the guidance is to:

- Identify those who are at risk of being exploited, by sharing information at an early stage and assessing risk using the Child Exploitation Screening Tool;
- Apply pro-active problem solving to address the risks associated with victims, perpetrators and locations and to ensure the safeguarding and welfare of children/young people who are or may be at risk from exploitation;
- Take proactive action against those who are intent on sexually or criminally abusing and exploiting children and young people;
- Ensure timely and effective interventions are offered to children and families so as to safeguard those vulnerable to exploitation.

- Ensure partnership agencies work collaboratively to safeguard children/young people who are being or are at risk of being exploited.
- To use data and intelligence to develop an understanding of child exploitation taking place across Newham, implement disruption tactics and ensure services are commissioned which can meet identified need.

As per the Pan London Safeguarding Procedures, existing Child Protection Procedures should be followed when there are concerns that a child is at risk of, or already a victim of, exploitation. This guidance aims to build on, and strengthen, existing practice, procedures and processes and will be continually updated in line with best practice, national research and local developments.

Children who are being exploited or where exploitation is suspected will not be held outside of children's social care, unless they do not meet the threshold for a response under section 17 Child In Need or section 47 Child Protection of the Children Act 1989. However, opportunities for early intervention to prevent escalation to statutory services prompted the design of a single integrated pathway involving universal and early help elements.

This guidance summarises the responsibility of all professionals and volunteers to take action to safeguard and intervene effectively to prevent the exploitation of children. For many, this will mean being alert to the ways in which children/young people can become vulnerable to exploitation, the indicators that they are being drawn into exploitative situations and knowing how to report these concerns. For others, who have more specific safeguarding responsibilities, it will involve complex work to support victims and disrupt and prosecute perpetrators. For everyone, it will involve questioning attitudes and beliefs that may get in the way of recognising that children are being exploited and providing the consistent, determined non-judgemental support they and their families need.

Newham's response to child exploitation has been informed by the development of a [Newham Adolescent Exploitation Strategy](#).

Partnership response: Child Exploitation Framework and Single Integrated Exploitation Pathway

The Newham Child Exploitation Framework promotes a multi-agency approach that responds to the government's objectives outlined in 'Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation' Progress Report February 2017 which are:

- Tackling offenders
- Reducing vulnerability
- Supporting victims and survivors.

The Framework seeks to unify a process of recognition, risk assessment, referral and discussion amongst professionals utilising a single process for all. By doing so, there is a clear pathway by which to ensure all organisations unify to provide the best service possible for all children and young people who are at risk of being exploited across Newham.

The Framework has four interrelated pillars supporting a single integrated pathway: Contextual Safeguarding Information and Intelligence Sharing Meeting (CSISM); Preventing Child Exploitation Harm Hub (PCEHH); Multi-agency Child Exploitation Panel (MACE); and Newham Adolescent Exploitation Strategic Group (NAESG).

Contextual Safeguarding Information and Intelligence Sharing Meeting (CSISM)

The CSISM has been established to support the development of an embedded CE and contextual safeguarding specialism in the MASH. The CSISM is an information and intelligence sharing meeting held three times a week with a focus on safeguarding adolescents from exploitation and extra-familial harm and the contexts where harm is happening. The meeting is led by a children's social care manager and a police detective lead for child exploitation.

The purpose of the meeting is to coordinate timely and proportionate responses to children and young people at risk of exploitation including signposting active cases to lead professionals, ensuring referrals to children's social care service are made where there is known or suspected significant harm. Incidents relating to children both missing from care will be looked at. Children reported missing will be allocated an independent return home interview unless it is agreed to allocate another professional to undertake the RHI. The meeting reviews new Child Exploitation Screening Tools, contacts/referrals where exploitation/extra familial risk is identified, information and intelligence and concerns about peer networks, locations and spaces and children reported missing.

THE CSISM enables the starting of the multi-agency discussion, planning and response at day one. Themes arising from the CSISM are reported to the MACE to inform the operational response to adolescent exploitation, extra-familial harm and contextual safeguarding.

Preventing Child Exploitation and Harm Hub (PCEHH)

The PCEHH is a weekly multidisciplinary meeting chaired by the Director of Early Help & Children's Health. The PCEHH helps to identify and engage with children and young people who may be potentially at risk from exploitation by responding to earlier 'critical moments' indicated via referrals from MASH.

The PCEHH panel is for children who are not open (and do not have siblings open) to Children's Social Care, where there are concerns around potential risk of exploitation and that need an early coordinated response to reduce risk. For the purposes of the PCEHH a child/young person or a group of children/young people are:

- anyone under the age of 25
- with known vulnerabilities and indicate emerging and/or escalating risks of exploitation that do not warrant social care involvement at this stage
- at risk of, or already experiencing harm caused by people outside their family and/or
- at risk of, or already causing harm to young people outside their family

PCEHH consists of representatives from a range of partner agencies who can make a significant contribution to the delivery of early help interventions in response to the identified need and risk. The initial referrer, where appropriate will be invited to attend PCEHH to share information and to form part of a coordinated family plan and response. Where a child/young person is considered at risk of exploitation and is already open to an early help service (i.e. Early Help Hub, Families First or the Youth Disruption Team), the child/young person should have already been discussed at the PCEHH and have a completed Child Exploitation Screening Tool.

Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panel (MACE)

The Multi-agency Child Exploitation Panel (MACE) takes place monthly and is chaired by a senior manager from children's social care and senior police officer.

The MACE meetings provides the framework to allow regular information sharing and action planning to tackle child exploitation and reduce extra-familial risk and harm across Newham. Representatives from a range of statutory, voluntary and community sector agencies attend the meeting.

The meeting discuss concerns about child exploitation already reviewed by the MASH. The MACE aims to ensures that a multi-agency assessment and safety plan has been completed, detailing the tactical response to be provided by relevant agencies.

The agenda is designed to ensure that all key information and intelligence is captured in every case so that the key themes and trends can be identified. Newham's MACE captures key information using the victim, offender, location, themes (VOLT) mnemonic, to make it easier to consistently share this information and intelligence among partners and across borders, as outlined in the Child Exploitation Pan-London Protocol.

In conjunction with dealing with individual cases of child exploitation, the meeting is a forum for information sharing to increase the understanding of the threat posed by child exploitation across the area. The MACE is not designed to case manage individual cases but identify, discuss and deliver a partnership response to short, medium- and longer-term themes, trends and patterns emerging from cases where there is risk from extra-familial factors.

The meeting does not and should not replace statutory planning processes such as strategy meetings, child protection conferences or care planning reviews for children looked after.

Themes arising from the MACE informs the response of the Newham Adolescent Exploitation Strategy Group (NAESG) which has strategic oversight of adolescent exploitation and extra-familial risk.

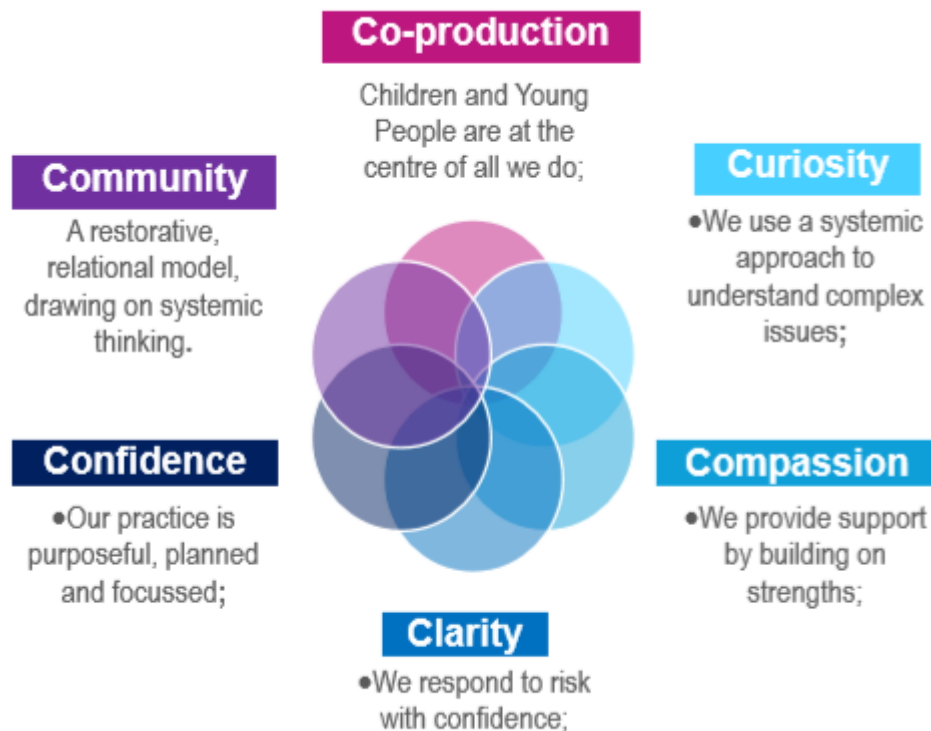
Newham Adolescent Exploitation Strategy Group (NAESG)

The Newham Adolescent Exploitation Strategy Group (NAESG) reports to the Newham Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP) and meets every two months. The group is chaired by a senior leader from LA children's services.

The purpose of the NAESG is to: oversee the Adolescent Exploitation Strategy and integrated youth safety action plan; ascertain that there are sufficient resources and policy direction to enable operational lead officers to undertake work to prevent exploitation, protect victims and to prosecute offenders and enable senior leaders to have a line of sight about the most vulnerable children and young people in addition to a clear understanding of the scale of child exploitation in Newham. This is put into action by responding to themes, trends, emerging risks and practice issues reported from the MACE Panel.

In addition, the group seeks assurance that best practice is undertaken and also takes account of local and national research to continually improve safeguarding arrangements in this area of work.

Model of practice and approaches



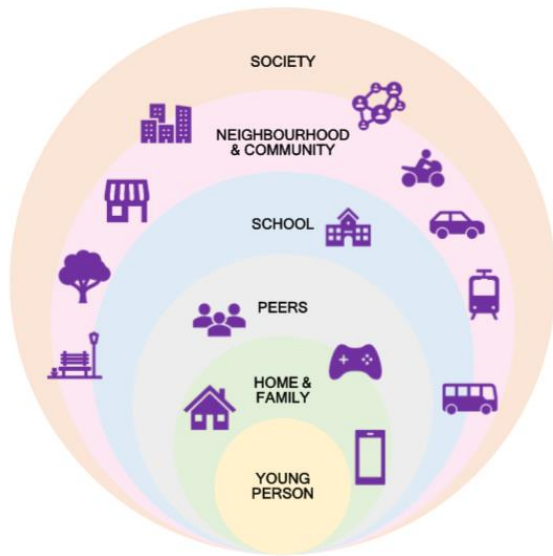
Relational/Systemic Model

We know that young people experience relationship difficulties in extra-familial contexts. Our commitment to systemic practice supports professionals to work with the interconnectedness of relationships and life experiences, including the full range of differences, identities and other cultural variations in our communities. A systemic approach provides opportunities for quality conversations that help us to build professional relationships and contribute to developing a skilled multi-agency workforce that works together to reduce risks and keep children/young people and families safe.

Trauma Informed Approach

Children/young people benefit from consistent, meaningful contact and trusting relationships with professionals. Trauma informed practice helps us to hear the voices of children/young people removing bias, stigma, labelling and victimization. Professionals should use intensive and consistent practice to process trauma, respond to behaviours, reduce fears, stress and anxiety, and promote wellbeing. We recognise that vicarious trauma can be experienced by professionals resulting from empathetic engagement with children/young people who have been the victims and perpetrators of harm, exploitation, violence and other traumatic incidents

Contextual Safeguarding Approach



We seek to understand and respond to children/young people's experiences beyond their families. We recognise the different relationships that children/young people form in neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature risks of violence, abuse and other harms. The concentric diagram illustrates contextual factors that can have an impact in the lives of children/young people. We know that there is interplay between contexts and relationships. As such, our approach to contextual safeguarding must be dynamic, particularly as criminal organisations adapt their operations to avoid detection and enforcement. There are inter-dependencies between drugs markets, gang activities, exploitation of children/young people and vulnerable adults and as such, a multi-tiered response is needed involving integrated working and co-ordination amongst all our agencies. We will take every context into account as we act together.

Forms of Exploitation

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

"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 in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or 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."

Like all forms of child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation:

- Can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex;
- Can still be abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;
- Can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;
- Can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;

- Can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or offers a sense of belonging.
- Children can also be coerced into exploitation via debt-bondage and/or blackmail, where they are tricked into working for little or no money to threats of violence;
- May occur without the child or young person's immediate knowledge (through others copying videos or images they have created and posting on social media).

For example:

Can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults. The abuse can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources.

Some groups are particularly vulnerable. These include children and young people who have a history of running away or of going missing from home, those with special needs, those in and leaving residential and foster care, migrant children, unaccompanied asylum seeking children, children who have disengaged from education and children who are abusing drugs and alcohol, and those involved in gangs

Sexual exploitation is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. All forms of child exploitation often feature a 'grooming stage'. Grooming is a process in which a bond or sense of loyalty is developed between the abuser and victim. Features of grooming can include:

- The giving of gifts or presents;
- Rewards - like mobile phone top-ups, and items of high value;
- False promises of love and/or affection;
- The provision of alcohol and drugs;
- Protection and a sense of safety.

Grooming is a way of developing an exclusive bond between abuser and victim. Young people are particularly vulnerable to grooming where the abuser deceptively constructs a connection between sought after love and affection, increased status, repay a debt. As a result of this process, many children and young people rarely initially recognise the coercive and abusive nature of the relationship and may even prioritise their attachment and loyalty to the abuser over their own safety and wellbeing.

Many children/young people are groomed into sexually exploitative relationships but other forms of entry exist. Some young people are engaged in informal economies that incorporate the exchange of sex for rewards such as drugs, alcohol, money or gifts. Others exchange sex for accommodation or money as a result of homelessness and experiences of poverty. Some children/young people have been bullied and threatened into sexual activities by peers or gangs which is then used against them as a form of extortion and to keep them compliant.

Sometimes, the child/young person does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation. In such situations, discussions with them about concerns should be handled with great sensitivity. Seeking prior advice from specialist agencies may

be useful, such as MASH or Divert Service. This should not involve disclosing personal, identifiable information at this stage.

In assessing whether a child or young person is a victim of sexual exploitation, or at risk, careful consideration should be given to the issue of consent. It is important to bear in mind that:

- A child under the age of 13 is not legally capable of consenting to sex (it is statutory rape) or any other type of sexual touching;
- Sexual activity with a child under 16 is also an offence;
- It is an offence for a person to have a sexual relationship with a 16 or 17 year old if they hold a position of trust or authority in relation to them;
- Where sexual activity with a 16 or 17 year old does not result in an offence being committed, it may still result in harm, or the likelihood of harm being suffered;
- Non-consensual sex is rape whatever the age of the victim; and
- If the victim is incapacitated through drink or drugs, or the victim or his or her family has been subject to violence or the threat of it, they cannot be considered to have given true consent; therefore offences may have been committed;

It is important to emphasise that because a child is 16 or 17 and can legally consent to sex, it does not make them less vulnerable to sexual exploitation. A child who is being exploited has not consented to sex regardless of their age. Hence the law regarding the age when a child or young person can consent to sex is only relevant when considering the offences with which a perpetrator may be charged.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour

The definition for children/young people who display harmful sexual behaviour refers to any child, under the age of 18, who demonstrates behaviour outside of their normative parameters of development. This includes, but is not exclusive to, abusive behaviours (Hackett 2011, National Institute of Health and Care Excellence 2014). Statistically, young boys are most likely to be perpetrators of sexual violence and sexual exploitation, and young girls are most likely to be at risk of or experience sexual exploitation (*Children's Commissioner's study*, Berelowitz *et al*, 2012).

However, the situation is more complex, as young men can experience sexual exploitation, including as part of violence and coercion to pressure them into performing acts as part of a group or gang which includes sexually exploiting others. Additionally, young girls can become involved in recruiting other young girls to be sexually exploited or be involved in acts of sexually exploiting others as part of their own experiences of being sexually exploited or as part of a pattern of violent offending. Currently there is likely to be a significant under-reporting of young boys who have experienced sexual exploitation (*Research on the sexual exploitation of boys and young men – A UK scoping study*, Barnardo's, August 2014).

When children/young people display harmful sexual behaviour it is important to consider whether the response should be to address these issues through the criminal justice system or to address welfare issues or a combination of the two. Research into harmful sexual behaviour demonstrates that some young people have histories of victimisation which has informed their own abuse of others. Young people who sexually harm their peers may also be coerced in a gang context, they may have experienced bullying themselves or their behaviour may be being influenced by others who are leading the abusive behaviour.

Child Criminal Exploitation

Child criminal exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child/young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity:

- In exchange for something the victim needs or wants;
- For the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator;
- 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. The criminal
- False promises of love and/or affection;
- The provision of alcohol and drugs;
- Protection and a sense of safety.

Exploitation of children/young people is not confined to county lines but can also include other forms of criminal activity such as theft, acquisitive crime, knife crimes and other forms of criminality. The NSPCC states that “Anybody can be a perpetrator of exploitation, no matter their age, gender or race. The relationship could be framed as friendship, someone to look up to or romantic. Children and young people who are exploited may also be used to ‘find’ or coerce others to join groups.” As with sexual exploitation, grooming means children/young people rarely initially recognise the coercive and abusive nature of the relationship and may even prioritise their attachment and loyalty to the abuser over their own safety and wellbeing.

County Lines

Child criminal exploitation is an element of county lines. The national definition of county lines: ‘A term used to describe gangs or organised criminal groups involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more areas using dedicated mobile phone lines. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and will often use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons.’

The groups often use local residential premises, often owned by a vulnerable person, as a base for their activities. This is often taken over by force or coercion (known as “cuckooing”), and in some instances victims have left their homes in fear of violence. Empty or commercial premises can also be used.

Perpetrators employ various tactics to evade detection, including rotating group members between locations so they are not identified by law enforcement or competitors. Perpetrators will also use women and children to transport drugs in the belief that they are less likely to be stopped and searched. Children are often ‘plugged’ (sometimes by the offender or by themselves) to transport the drugs.

Evidence of county lines will often become apparent to professionals when children are located after missing episodes outside the London area, where there is no apparent reason. Involvement with in-force drugs supply is almost identical in nature to county lines style exploitation. The risks presented to the children involved in this type of exploitative behaviour are just as severe as those involved in county lines.

Particular attention must be paid to drug debts as seizing drugs or money will often perpetuate the cycle of criminality as children are further forced to 'work off' the debt (known as debt bondage). Groups may also seek to entrap children by staging robberies to then entrap the child.

Child Trafficking

It's defined as recruiting, moving, receiving and harbouring children for the purpose of exploitation. This exploitation can be criminal or sexual. Child trafficking is a form of modern slavery. Children can be trafficked into the UK from overseas and on their journeys are very often subject to sexual abuse. International child trafficking can be incorrectly labelled as child smuggling. Professionals are encouraged to be professionally curious in order to identify the trafficking risk indicators and implement a collaborative safeguarding response to the child.

Children/young people can also be trafficked from one part of the UK to another as evidenced in county lines. Child Trafficking varies from spontaneous networking between groups of offenders, to more serious organised crime where young people are effectively 'sold'. Children/young people can be trafficked for criminal exploitation, and this can occur across and within Local Authority (LA) boundaries, regions and across international borders. This can occur at parties and gatherings where children who are involved may recruit others into the network. Some of this activity is described as serious organised crime and can involve the organised 'buying and selling' of children by offenders.

Responding to the vulnerability is a key factor. Exploiters may act as interpreters therefore it is important the child is spoken to independently. Utilising accredited independent translators from the outset is key to capturing the best evidence. Investigations should be subject to a Section 47 joint investigation. A full risk assessment must be undertaken by all professionals before ensuring the child is placed with a suitable adult.

Radicalisation

Radicalisation is defined as the process by which people, including children, come to support terrorism and extremism and in some cases, to then participate in terrorist groups. Radicalisation also includes grooming into far right groups as well as Islamism and other forms. Radicalisation is not about a specific faith or demographic and there is no obvious profile of a person likely to become involved in extremism or a single indicator of when a person might move to adopt violence in support of extremist ideas. The process of radicalisation is different for every individual and can take place over an extended period or within a very short time frame and often involves an element of exploitation. For further guidance please review the [document](#) produced by Department of Education. The response to radicalisation has its own pathway in terms of Prevent and Channel.

Online Child Exploitation

This generation has grown up in a digital world which has improved people's lives in many ways, such as giving us multiple methods to communicate and share information. It is a constantly changing and dynamic world that is now an essential part of a child's life. However, these freedoms also create new risks – according to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP), a significant number of child exploitation offences take place online. These offences include deceiving children into producing indecent images of themselves and engaging in sexual chat online or sexual activity over a webcam. 2020 has also seen a significant increase of online grooming for child criminal exploitation including county lines.

Children/young people at risk of online harm may not have any previous vulnerabilities. The first parents may know that their child has been a victim of exploitation is when the police contact the family. Children often do not see the dangers of sharing intimate images of themselves to strangers. The internet creates a false feeling of security and diminishes inhibitions that would exist offline. The anonymous nature of the internet allows perpetrators to adopt false personas and build trust via online conversations. Children can fail to realise that they lose control of uploaded images, falsely believing the properties of social media applications will protect them. This leads to risks of blackmail and coercion against the child.

These factors can lead to any of the following risks:

- Online grooming and child abuse.
- Access to age-inappropriate content.
- Financial exploitation, where young people's bank accounts are used by exploiters to launder the proceeds from criminal activities.
- Bullying and cyberbullying.
- Personal information being obtained by perpetrator.
- Talking to strangers or people who misrepresent themselves.

Youth-produced Sexual Imagery identified in schools

Children/young people may take nude and sexual images of themselves and share them with other children and, whilst the taking and receiving of such images is a criminal offence and a criminal justice response may be necessary in some cases, the focus should be on providing a collaborative response which educates, supports and safeguards all children involved.

The following offences could be committed by sexting:

- Take or permit to take an indecent photo or video of themselves or another person under 18.
- Share an indecent image or video of another person under 18, even if it's shared between young people of a similar age.
- Possess, download or store an indecent image or video of a child/young person under 18, even if that young person gave their permission for it to be created.

Peer-on-peer Exploitation

Children/young people can be exploited by children/young people of a similar age as well as adults. Research is increasingly demonstrating that a significant number of exploited children have been abused by their peers. A London Councils report in 2014 found that peer-on-peer exploitation was the most frequently identified form of child exploitation in London. Children can be exploited by their peers in a number of ways. In some cases children who have been exploited themselves by adults or peers, will recruit other children to be abused. In other instances, sexual bullying in schools and other social settings can result in the exploitation of children by their peers.

Exploitation also occurs within and between street gangs, where sex is used in exchange for safety, protection, drugs and simply belonging.

For 16 and 17-year-olds who are in abusive relationships, what may appear to be a case of domestic abuse may also involve criminal exploitation. In all cases of peer-on-peer exploitation a power imbalance will still drive the relationship, but this inequality will not necessarily be the result of an age gap between the abuser and the abused.

Organised Begging

Organised begging is likely to be a form of modern slavery and if children are concerned it is a form of forced or compulsory labour. It occurs when Organised Crime Groups traffic and coerce vulnerable people to beg in busy retail or tourist areas. There is no specific offence of organised begging however, those who participate in organised begging may have been trafficked into the UK and may be held in conditions that may amount to slavery or servitude. Debt bondage is sometimes used to force individuals to beg. Children may also be used as props to generate feelings of sympathy.

Children who go Missing

Going missing or being absent from home or school has been consistently identified as a key vulnerability in relation to CSE and one of the main indicators that a child is already being exploited. Of course, there are many reasons why a child may not be where they are supposed to be, but consideration should always be given to whether they might be at risk of sexual exploitation or are being exploited.

Current research findings estimate that approximately 25 per cent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm and there are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. For example, according to recent studies, children in care (CIC) missing from their placements are vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation, especially children in residential care.

Children/young people may go missing for quite short periods of time. They may be absent from school for part of the school day or not be where their carers expect them to be for 2 or 3 hours. It is important to be alert to shorter periods of time when children are absent as this can also indicate that a child is being groomed for exploitation or is already being exploited. Children may give no explanation for their absence or their explanation may not be plausible or consistent particularly when they are absent on a number of occasions.

Of course, children/young people also go missing for longer periods of time, sometimes overnight and sometimes for days on end and the risks increase that they are vulnerable to exploitation or are being exploited when there are extended and/or repeated missing incidents.

Independent Return Home Interviews (RHIs) with the child/young person can help in establishing why they went missing and the subsequent support that may be required, as well as preventing repeat incidents. Information gathered from return interviews will be used to inform the identification, referral and assessment of any child exploitation cases.

Factors Which Increase Risk

Exploited children/young people come from a range of backgrounds and may have no additional risk factors or vulnerabilities, therefore, professionals should always keep an open mind to the possibility that a child may be at risk of exploitation. However, children/young people can be at increased risk of exploitation if they have any additional vulnerabilities, as perpetrators may target them and try to exploit these vulnerabilities.

Contextual risks associated with public spaces in local neighbourhoods, schools and peer groups

Asides from the reported targeting of some residential children's homes, sexual exploitation rarely occurs within the homes that young people live. Serious case reviews, case file reviews and local problem profiles have identified sexual exploitation occurring in local parks, shopping centres, hotels, transport hubs, schools and alternative education provision and other spaces which children/young people socialise.

As well as exploitation occurring in these environments, children/young people who are already being exploited may also recruit individuals with whom they socialise. These children/young people may have no additional vulnerabilities, hence, regardless of the individual vulnerabilities outlined above children/young people may also be at additional risk because of the neighbourhood they live in and the other children/young people with whom they spend time. For example:

- Living in a neighbourhood affected by gangs;
- Gang association either through relatives, peers or intimate relationships;
- Attending school with young people who are exploited;
- Friends with young people who are exploited.

Risks relating to gender and sexuality

Children/young people who do not conform to their family or community's expectations of gender and sexual identity and/or behaviour are more likely to feel isolated and unable to disclose sexual exploitation if they experience it. They might fear:

- Being judged and labelled: these fears are likely to be different for boys and girls. Girls are more likely to fear being judged as sexually available whilst boys may fear their masculinity and sexuality being questioned if they refuse sex.
- Being forced into marriage: Violence from family/community members who feel they have brought shame onto the group.

In addition, perpetrators may target children/young people who they know come from families and/or communities with strongly held and negative views of sex outside of marriage and of same sex relationships as this leaves those young people particularly vulnerable to self-blaming and blackmail.

Young people particularly at risk include the following:

- Boys and girls whose gender identity differs from the sex they were given at birth or who question their gender identity;
- Boys who have sex with boys or are believed to be attracted to boys;
- Girls who are sexually active or are believed to be sexually active. Girls are particularly likely to experience strong familial and social pressure to not have sex outside of marriage or a long term relationship and/or not to give any appearance that they are sexually active;
- Young people who do not conform to gender norms;
- Young people who are believed to be, or are having, inter-racial/religious relationships and these relationships are disapproved of by their family/community.

Key Principles of Intervention

Child exploitation is happening everywhere – there is a clear need for all professionals working with children/young people to remain curious to their circumstances noting that if it isn't actively sought

out, it will not be uncovered. This requires different skills – police officers to act more like social workers, social workers to act more like detectives and local politicians and Police and Crime Commissioners to be questioning of children's services and police about missing children and ensuring that robust processes are in place locally.

This was the finding of Oxfordshire County Council following their investigation into child sexual exploitation. This investigation uncovered the horrific, organised sexual exploitation of children which had been ongoing over a number of years. A number of perpetrators were successfully prosecuted but the Serious Case Review that followed found that opportunities to stop the exploitation had been repeatedly missed:

The fact that scores of professionals from numerous disciplines, and tens of organisations or departments, took a long time to recognise CSE, used language that appeared at least in part to blame victims and see them as adults, and had a view that little could be done in the face of 'no cooperation' demonstrates that the failures were common to organisational systems.

The principles underpinning our response to the exploitation of children/young people include the following:

- Child exploitation is a form of child abuse
- Child exploitation can lead to children being subjected to serious youth violence
- Exploited children should be treated as victims of abuse, not as offenders
- Children may be victims as well as perpetrators

Focus on the perpetrators

The focus of work to prevent child exploitation should be on identifying, disrupting and prosecuting the perpetrators. The emphasis should not be on children/young people where they are victims to change their behaviour or move schools or home in order to stop the abuse. Perpetrators should be actively pursued by all available means, regardless of the degree of victim cooperation.

Where the perpetrators are also children: contextual safeguarding, intervening with peer groups and in the community

Where the perpetrator/s are also children/young people, consideration should be given at the meetings as to the most effective and appropriate disruption and prevention tactics. In order to disrupt this type of behaviour a number of issues should be taken into consideration:

Is the young person being abusive on their own? If a group is involved a peer group intervention using similar techniques as currently used in restorative justice may be appropriate. It will also be important to identify the leader/s and to work with bystanders.

Consideration also needs to be given to the different ways in which the exploitation occurs and the different locations that may be used. For example, exploitation may well take place on buses and in unmonitored and poorly monitored spaces at school and in local neighbourhoods. Interventions should reflect this and may involve improving lighting and the monitoring of these locations – for example, community safety officers might increase patrols in these areas. Also, bus companies may need to raise staff awareness to ensure they know how to identify potentially vulnerable children/young people and how they should report their concerns appropriately.

It is also important that the potential vulnerability of child perpetrators is assessed and where appropriate support is provided. Recent research has found that half of 11-17 year olds known to Youth Offending Services have themselves been the victim of abuse, violence, crime or other traumatic experiences and most of these have emotional and mental health needs that are linked to these experiences.

Offending behaviour

In some cases children/young people will be involved in offending behaviour or drawn into this behaviour by the perpetrators. They might become involved in theft, the sale and distribution of drugs or in grooming other young people for exploitation. In these cases, the response to their offending should be proportionate. It should recognise the exploitative context in which the offending is taking place, including that intimidation and/or threats of violence may well be occurring. The response should also consider the vulnerability of the child/young person and whether fears of being prosecuted for offending behaviour may get in the way of a young person disclosing the exploitation they are experiencing. Victims should be offered practical and therapeutic support. This support should be made available to victims over an extended period of time as they may take months or years to feel ready to take up offers of help.

Working with children and young people

Prejudices and misunderstandings

Enquiries into the exploitation of children/young people have repeatedly highlighted that the children/young people who are exploited are often misunderstood to be consenting to their abuse, and where it is recognised that they are being exploited, the children are often believed to have brought it on themselves. These misunderstandings and prejudices have led to the failure to effectively safeguard children who have gone on to suffer appalling abuse over extended periods of time.

It is therefore very important that professionals and volunteers think about and challenge any preconceptions and prejudices they may hold particularly as they relate to children/young people. Common misconceptions include:

- Girls who wear clothing that is perceived as 'modest' and/or religiously observant clothing will not be victims of sexual exploitation;
- Boys always want to have sex;
- That the children/young people being exploited are 'streetwise' and in control of what is happening to them.

Unconscious bias leads to social stereotypes and stigma about groups of people that we form outside of our conscious awareness. They are common to everyone, and recognising our biases is crucial so that they do not have negative impact on professional decision making. Addressing unconscious bias is critical to tackling issues of race and gender disproportionality, and other forms of discrimination.

The importance of language

Victims of exploitation talk about being blamed, not being believed and professionals not caring. The Serious Case Review in Oxfordshire emphasises the importance of the language used to talk about the victims and how this language located responsibility for the abuse with the victims.

The language used demonstrated the lack of full understanding of CSE at the time. It described the girls getting themselves 'into trouble'. Other examples... included "[The missing person] is believed to be prostituting herself... to pay for drugs', 'putting themselves at risk' "She is a streetwise girl who is wilful..." "She associates with adults who have warnings for firearms and drugs. It is possible she is prostituting herself" "... Deliberately puts herself as risk as she goes off with older men that are strangers". The girls saw staff as critical of them and (while all the girls spoken to acknowledged how 'difficult' they were) felt staff were not able to make a real human connection with them.

Children/young people who are being exploited may not co-operate with attempts by professionals to stop the abuse for a number of reasons including:

- The difficulty they have in understanding the abusive nature of their involvement with the perpetrators.
- Threats of extreme violence. Perpetrators may threaten victims to stop them disclosing what is happening to them. These threats can also be made against friends and family. Victims have talked about the extreme danger they faced and what happened when action was taken without sufficient planning for their safety

Never giving up on a child – 'persistent engagement'

The provision of consistent, non-judgemental, relational support will give more confidence to children and young people to disclose and give evidence. Victims talk about the importance of having a professional who listened and showed that they cared.

Reachable moments

The SCR into Child C identified that there are circumstances when a child may be more likely to take up offers of support. For example, after being arrested in a county lines situation, or when they have been stabbed or shot and are in hospital etc. We need to capitalise on opportunities to reach out to children/young people.

Disclosure

It is important for professionals to be aware that children/young people might disclose indirectly – it is quite common for children to say that the abuse is happening to a friend or someone they know when in fact it is they themselves who are being abused.

Relocation

Whilst victims may sometimes need help to move out of a school or neighbourhood because the risks are too great for them to remain, all other alternatives should be explored and, where possible, plans to reintegrate them back into their homes and communities should be made.

Too often victims have been expected/required to leave their neighbourhoods and support networks in order to stop the abuse – this has left 'victim vacuums' in the places where they have been moved from with other young people being targeted by perpetrators. It has also left already vulnerable children/young people more at risk as a result of being moved away from their familiar world. It can also give the implicit message to the victim and those around them that it is their fault.

Working with parents/carers

When working with parents or carers it is important to make every effort to involve them as protective and supportive factors in the child/young person's lives even where there may have been or still are concerns about their parenting. It is important to emphasise that professionals should not assume that Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection processes are punitive to parents. They are a mechanism by which professionals share their concerns regarding a child with parents and, wherever possible, a plan is developed in partnership with the parents in order to try and keep that child safe. Where parents are or can be a protective factor it is important that:

- They are supported;
- They are included in the assessment of the risk to their child and incorporated into the plans made to protect them;
- They are kept informed about progress or lack of progress in relation to protecting their child;
- If their child is missing, they are kept informed of efforts to find them and immediately informed when their child is found;
- That their concerns are listened and responded to;

That their knowledge and understanding of their child informs the assessment and planning.

PART B

Part B of the practice guidance references Newham's multi-agency procedures, protocols and guidance that should be used when working with children in care at risk of extra-familial harm or abuse.

Professionals must ensure that they are familiar with the following

- Guidance for management of strategy discussions/meetings
- Pan London Child Protection Procedures
- Pan London Child Exploitation Protocol
- Missing and Returned Children Practice Guidance
- Critical Incident Protocol

Research and good practice examples can be found in the CYPS Practice Library.

Where professionals are concerned about the exploitation of a child they should consult with their designated safeguarding professional lead and make a referral to the MASH. This process mirrors those for all children where there are safeguarding concerns. MASH will process the referral in line with the thresholds guidance.

If a child is allocated within Children's Social Care then the professional will be expected complete an assessment of the exploitation concerns using the Child Exploitation Screening Tool and send to the MASH for triage. The professional should seek advice from their manager, and if required, from the specialist child exploitation and missing team in the Integrated Adolescent Safeguarding Service.

Guidance on completing the Child Exploitation Screening Tool can be found in xx.

Clarifying the cause for concern: information gathering and monitoring

Professionals may have concerns that a child/young person is at risk of exploitation, but the concerns maybe non-specific and could have arisen for a number of different reasons. These concerns might arise because something unusual happens or the child/young person's behaviour changes.

For example:

- A child/young person who has not previously been seen with expensive belongings, starts to be seen with expensive clothes and/or phone etc. and there is no immediate explanation;
- A child/young person truants from school on 2 or 3 occasions;
- A child/young person's appearance and personal hygiene deteriorates;
- A child/young person's behaviour and/or mood deteriorates and there is no obvious explanation.

In these circumstances, the professional should:

- Keep an open mind – there may be a number of different reasons for these changes;
- Discuss their concerns with their designated safeguarding professional lead or child exploitation specialist, who will be able to offer advice and suggestions for further action and also decide whether a referral to LA children's social care is required;

- Gather information – often it is only when otherwise small pieces of information are shared that it is possible to see whether they add up to a serious concern. Alternatively, sharing information can allay fears by providing a reassuring explanation.

Upon referral the MASH will complete a Child Exploitation Screening Tool. This tool helps professionals to identify whether a child/young person may be vulnerable to exploitation, is being groomed or targeted for the purposes of exploitation or is being exploited. It is designed to support professional judgement and to help guide decisions into what action is needed.

Child Exploitation Screening Tool

The Child Exploitation Screening Tool should be completed for all children including cases open to children's services:

- Where there are signs of exploitation, but this needs further exploration;
- When there are clear indicators that would suggest that the child is being exploited but this needs further exploration;
- Where there is evidence that the child is being exploited;
- Where there is evidence that the child is being exploited and there are concerns that they are recruiting other children to be exploited.

Depending on the remit of the organisation and the role of the professional, it may be appropriate to:

- Share concerns with other professionals who know the young person and ask if they have also noticed that something is different;
- Talk to the young person themselves, explaining the concerns (it is important not to ask leading questions, to be non-judgemental and not make assumptions about what is happening);
- Talk to siblings, friends and classmates, asking them if there is anything going on; it is important to maintain confidentiality and be mindful of the potential impact of talking about the situation with other young people;
- Talk to parents and carers; it is important to share concerns with parents and carers whilst also being mindful of the potential impact on the young person and their relationship with their parents/carers.

The Child Exploitation Screening Tool uses the term 'child' deliberately to remind us that a child at risk of exploitation is a child in need of protection and not a young adult making poor choices. It is designed to be used by all professionals working with children and parents or carers. A child is defined as a person who is under 18 years of age.

The screening tool is designed to help identify possible risks of exploitation and should be used where there are such concerns about a child. Observations of behaviours and any significant changes will be important as children will often deny or be unaware that they are being exploited. Significant changes in behaviours, a single high-risk episode or multiple risk factors may indicate that the child is a victim of abuse through exploitation rather than a teenager experimenting with risk taking.

Where a professional has concerns about the possibility that a child is at risk or there is suspicion or evidence of child exploitation completing a screening tool should always be a consideration. This is an initial screening tool, and not a risk assessment.

Exercising professional judgment is key when completing the tool. Professionals need to use their judgement as factors such as the child's age, any additional vulnerabilities, their history etc. may mean that for another child it would be a lower level for that child is a higher level. Without professional judgment, the classification of indicators as emerging, escalation or significant is an arbitrary process.

Completion of the screening tool will help indicate when intervention, support and action are required for a child at any given time.

The tool can be used to enable all professionals to be aware of the types of indicators of harm likely to be present when a child is being or is likely to be exploited. Identifying the presence of these indicators can help professionals decide what level and types of interventions may be appropriate. The tool can be used in supervision, in discussions with parents and carers, with other professionals and with the child.

The needs of children who are being or are likely to be exploited will change over time. Service responses need to be flexible to respond to these changes. Early intervention is essential to prevent escalation of harm. While most interventions with those children who are identified as At Risk will be preventative work in schools, through youth services and children's service providers, emergency crisis intervention might be required. Where unknown risk is identified then further investigation may be required to confirm or clarify suspicions.

Interventions with children who have been identified as Medium or High Risk of exploitation should be coordinated by a lead professional. A relational approach and persistent engagement is likely to be required when a child has been identified as being at Medium or High Risk.

The MASH will take responsibility for recording the referral. Where following triage the concerns relating to exploitation are confirmed a multi-agency management decision will be made by child exploitation specialists co-located in the MASH on the most appropriate course of action based on the level of risk. The professional completing the tool will be informed of the decision and next steps.

Once completed there are several outcomes:

- Risk of exploitation is not a key vulnerability at this point. If this is the case this document should be kept securely. If concerns increase please update and review if a referral to MASH is needed.

- Screening tool indicates that there is a risk of exploitation.

Guidance

Professional Assessment Section

The Exploitation and Harm Indicator and Strengths and Resilience Factor sections should help inform your professional judgment of what the plan for the child should be.

What is working well – where known?

Include protective factors:

- People, situations and actions that contribute to the wellbeing of the child and to plans about how they could be made safe.
- Actions already being taken to make sure the child is safe.
-

What is your analysis of risk and your view about what needs to happen next?

Include risk factors, whether they are suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.

- Harm – actual hurt, injury or abuse (likely) caused by adults in the past or present
- Risk taking behaviour by the child

This should include the inter-relationship between the various identified Exploitation and Harm Indicators and Strengths and Resilience Factors. You should use evidence for your findings and explain how your judgment has been reached.

What needs to happen next is the initial plan and should include what outcomes you are hoping are achieved.

Referral pathway and advice to referrers

If the information suggests a child/young person is at immediate risk of harm, the matter should be reported to the police straight away. A referral should also be made to MASH, when the Child Exploitation Screening Tool will be completed and a strategy meeting convened.

If a child/young person is not at immediate risk of harm, following NSCP procedures, a referral should also be made to the MASH where a Child Exploitation Screening Tool will also be completed. This is to ensure a consistent approach is taken to recording, responding to referrals, analyzing the risks to the child/young person, identifying potential perpetrators and locations and to assist the gathering of information to the prevalence of Child Exploitation across Newham.

Screening of referrals

Where an individual or agency contacts MASH regarding a child/young person who they identify as being at risk of exploitation, MASH will assess whether the information supplied indicates a risk of exploitation. Where the information supplied clearly doesn't indicate risk factors, the person or agency who made contact will be informed of this and why. If no further information of risk is supplied and there are no other concerns for the child/young person, Early Help will be notified following consent of the parents.

MASH will screen all referrals to ensure that exploitation isn't a factor. If it is considered to be a factor, MASH will advise the professional.

Upon receiving a referral and screening tool, MASH will complete their basic checks, including whether or not the child/young person is known to Children's Social Care. The referral will be recorded and, for allocated cases, MASH will send it to the allocated social work team to make appropriate enquiries and consider whether to hold a strategy meeting/discussion.

As part of the MASH research, any referrals related to exploitation will be discussed with the embedded child exploitation and violence reduction specialists involving key partner agencies based at the MASH. Any information gathered by the embedded specialists will form part of the MASH research. Based on the information collected and advice provided by the embedded specialists, a decision will be made to the level of the presenting need and where to refer to the child/ young person to the appropriate level of service and intervention pathway required:

- No further action
- Early Help
- S17 Initial Assessment
- S47 Child Protection

The rationale for the decision will be recorded on the Child Exploitation Screening Tool with recommended actions. The decision will include identification of the level of risk, based on the following Child Exploitation Risk Criteria:

No Risk	Exploitation currently not a factor. Concerns relate to age-appropriate behaviours
Unknown Risk	Limited information but concern that exploitation may be a factor
At Risk	Evidence/concern of vulnerability to exploitation
Medium Risk	Evidence/concern of being groomed or targeted
High Risk	Evidence/concern of being exploited

The same risk criteria will be used at other key points during the child's involvement with children's services (Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meetings and MACE Panel) to support consistency in threshold application and consistency in the measurement of the impact of interventions/ plans in increasing safety/ reducing harm. The identified intervention pathway should be closely linked to the identified level of risk. See practice guidance on Child Exploitation Screening Tool.

A Child Exploitation flag will also be added on the child's record. This will be removed once it has been agreed at a Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meeting or MACE Panel that there is evidence that exploitation is no longer a factor at this time, or following completion of a Child Exploitation Screening Tool that suggests the risk is no longer evident. This is another measure to enable an assessment of the nature and extent of child exploitation in Newham. The Child Exploitation Screening Tool must be updated and risk re-evaluated at a minimum every 6 months.

The value of the embedded child exploitation and violence reduction specialism in the MASH is that it will focus on disruption from a multi-agency perspective and will support the gathering of data, mapping and intelligence on themes, patterns and trends affecting children and young people in Newham. Multi-agency disruption action may involve:

- Support, intervention or diversion for the victim
- A person of interest or exploiter; or

- A location.

Possible disruption opportunities should be considered as soon as possible and professionals should refer to options outlined in the Home Office Disruption Toolkit to inform the development of a safety plan. Safety plans where child exploitation is the main focus including actions to disrupt are mainly agreed at strategy discussions and Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meetings, but where appropriate they can be agreed at other planning meetings.

It is likely that the initial safety plan will be developed as more information comes to light. Sometimes it is possible for a robust plan to be put in place at the strategy discussion informed by the completion of the Child Exploitation Screening Tool and MASH triage process.

Safety plans should be incorporated into the overall planning for a child (i.e. CIN, CP or Care/Pathway Plan) – they should not be seen as stand-alone plans. The plan should be reviewed frequently and in response to changing levels of risk.

Referrals for children in care from out of authority

For children who are placed in Newham by another LA and where child exploitation has been raised as a concern, a referral with a completed Child Exploitation Screening Tool, Missing Trigger Plan and relevant assessments will need to be made to the MASH. Any additional intervention identified will need to be commissioned by the responsible LA for a specialist service to be provided. In the event of an immediate safeguarding concern for a child placed by another LA, the embedded specialists in MASH will facilitate a Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meeting and attendance will be required by the placing authority social worker and team manager.

Direct Referrals to the Police

Police officers have been trained to identify the signs of child exploitation and report this through as a vulnerable child referral. 10 risk factors/indicators are included on this referral to assist officers in identifying child exploitation. The child referral desk also reviews all referrals and reported crimes to ensure no signs of child exploitation are missed. Safeguarding Police Community Safety Officers (PCSOs) are also deployed to follow up information and intelligence relating to child exploitation.

Referrals on cases allocated to children's services

Professionals should support children, young people and their families to manage risk within current well-established frameworks as part of the overall plan for the child/young person including the use of safety plans. If concerns develop a Child Exploitation Screening Tool should be completed and sent to the MASH team for triage and consultation involving the embedded child exploitation specialists. The screening tool should be recorded on the children's file and reviewed at each Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meeting where the risk is deemed to be Medium or High and/or at no more than 6 months intervals where the risk has reduced.

Early Help

Following MASH triage, if a decision is made that the referral does not require statutory intervention, it will be progressed to the Preventing Child Exploitation and Harm Hub (PCEHH) panel for intervention. Parents/carers will be informed of this at the MASH and consent will be evidenced.

All cases must have followed existing child protection procedures prior to being discussed at the PCEHH, including referral to the MASH, completion of a Child Exploitation Screening Tool and

strategy meeting/discussion where appropriate. The screening tool will accompany any referral to the PCEHH and will be reviewed and considered as part of any agreed support plan.

The PCEHH will agree a lead agency who will co-ordinate the Early Help Assessment that incorporates the agreed PCEHH's support package as part of the ongoing family plan. The Early Help Record and plan will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that progress is made towards the desired outcomes. Interventions may include the following:

- Ensuring that parents/carers of children and young people who are at risk of exploitation have access to awareness training (e-learning or parenting programme) to understand the different forms of child exploitation and how they can employ simple strategies to help keep their children and young people safe;
- Support children and young people that have been identified as being at risk of exploitation to develop their resilience, reduce their presenting vulnerabilities and susceptibility and promoting positive activities;
- Provide access to psycho-education about safe and healthy relationships in association with children's health, schools and sexual health services;
- Consider support for any younger siblings of those that may be at risk to prevent them from being potentially exploited in the future.

No agency should delay action against referrals whilst waiting for a discussion at the next PCEHH meeting. Action to protect children should be a priority for all agencies and the PCEHH meeting serves as a process to ensure that activity is taking place and is co-ordinated.

Strategy Meeting/Discussion

If a child is suspected to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as per NSCP procedures a strategy meeting and Section 47 investigation should be initiated, and a joint visit with the police should be undertaken within one working day and a strategy meeting/discussion held.

Strategy discussions by telephone will usually be adequate to plan an enquiry, but meetings are likely to be more effective where there are concerns about extra-familial risk.

Where the concerns are particularly complex or complicated, for example involving a number of individual children/young people, the strategy meeting must be held within a maximum of five working days, but sooner if there is a need to provide immediate protection to a child.

The purpose of a strategy meeting is to decide if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm and whether a section 47 enquiry should be carried out. If the child is not assessed as at risk of significant harm, the meeting should decide if the child meets the threshold for services as a child in need or whether the child should be referred to the PCEHH with an allocated lead professional developing and reviewing a support plan.

Following NSCP procedures a strategy discussion must take the form of a meeting, chaired by a manager from children's social care, if there is clear evidence of child exploitation. The meeting should refer to the child exploitation strategy meeting prompts to guide the discussion at the meeting.

Attendance at the meeting of the child and their family should be considered unless attendance will compromise the child's safety or the progress of an enquiry and further investigation. The final decision should be taken by the LA children's social care team manager. This decision, rationale and

any contingency plan should be clearly recorded on the child's case file and actions to safeguard progressed.

Outcome of Strategy Meeting

There are three possible outcomes of the Strategy Meeting/Discussion:

- Where it is likely that a child is at risk of significant harm, child protection procedures under Section 47 will commence;
- If the threshold is not met for child protection procedures but the child/young person meets the threshold for services as a 'child in need', an assessment should take place and where appropriate a child in need plan will be put in place;
- Where the 'child in need' threshold isn't met, then a lead professional will be identified and an early help plan will be put in place.

The meeting should also decide if the organised and complex abuse procedures should be invoked. The pan-London Child Protection Procedures apply where there are multiple victims and/or perpetrators.

Child Protection Procedures may be more useful when the parents are thought to be neglectful, collusive or a contributing factor to the child's vulnerability to being exploited. The reason for the decision should always be recorded. Where it is decided that a child/young person is at risk of exploitation (suffering significant harm) but Child Protection Procedures are not necessary this decision and the reason should be clearly recorded in a Management Decision on the child's file.

Where a Child Protection enquiry is not needed an assessment should take place under section 17 Children Act (if this has not already happened) and the child should be made subject of a Child in Need Plan.

The strategy meeting must consider the safety plan; the risk level; the date for a review of actions; and identify the keyworker who will hold responsibility for the safety plan.

The safety plan needs to outline both actions already in place and those agreed at the strategy meeting.

A child exploitation safety plan should always be completed as an outcome of a strategy meeting where the main concern is child exploitation. The strategy meeting/discussion must be recorded on the strategy meeting/discussion Azeus form.

Assessment

Assessment of and planning for children and young people should be mindful of the signs of exploitation and the contexts where harm may be occurring. Child exploitation is dynamic; children and young people's circumstances can change and on occasions deteriorate very rapidly. Whether completing an Early Help Assessment, AssetPlus or Single Assessment all professionals should be aware that assessments need to be continual and display vigilance for change. Where extra-familial risk is identified a Child Exploitation Screening Tool and safety plan should be completed. If during an assessment it emerges that there are Child Protection concerns within the family home involving other children including siblings, Child Protection Procedures should be followed.

Case Management and Planning

In line with national guidance and legislation we expect all children/young people open to have their assessment and support planning managed through a single individual multi-agency assessment and planning process by a lead professional. Recognising that trusted relationships are key to supporting children and young people to reduce the likelihood of exploitation in the future.

Where children/young people are identified as being at risk of exploitation and there are known extra-familial risk concerns, a plan should be put in place that identifies how support will be offered to the child/young person and their family/carers. All interventions should be guided by the planning process.

It is expected that the majority of children needing support will be supported under a Child in Need (CIN) plan. Newham children's social care services use CIN processes to protect children at risk of child exploitation where there are no or very limited concerns relating to the family home. Child Protection Procedures must be used where there are additional safeguarding concerns relating to the family. CIN planning meetings must decide if Child Protection Conference procedures should be initiated in instances where there are clear and evidenced concerns about familial/parenting concerns as well as extra-familial risk factors. All such decisions should be recorded and the rationale explained as to the respective relevance and aims of the different planning and intervention processes.

Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meeting

Responding to the most complex forms of extra-familial risk requires a complex multi-agency network. Multi-agency intervention and support should take into account of wider environmental factors and locations and contexts that impact on a child's risk and vulnerability. Effective multi-agency safeguarding will therefore involve a wide range of partner agencies who could help reduce/prevent risk, and disrupt exploitation activity, for example Licensing, Community Safety etc

For children/young people where there is current exploitation assessed as Medium or high Risk following completion of a Child Exploitation Screening Tool, Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meetings will be needed to support and inform the overall plan for the child/young person. Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meetings should be held at a minimum of 6-weekly intervals, reducing as risk reduces. For children in care this meeting will initially be held separate to a LAC review with a clear plan of moving to one plan as soon as possible. The chair of the meeting will be a different chair to the IRO and the plan will be reviewed under the Child Exploitation Safety Planning process until the risks have reduced and can be managed by the LAC review process.

In situations where there is organized exploitation, a continued imminent risk of harm and changing perpetrators, the scheduled meeting frequency may need to be increased to weekly, bi-weekly or monthly depending on the professional assessment of harm. Multi-agency partners should contribute to this decision and to plans to safeguard and disrupt activity, where children are at risk of harm.

Wherever possible the aim should be to have a single unified plan which addresses the risk and harm for the child/ young person including in situations where the child/young person is subject to both a YOS Order and involved with Children's Social Care.

Where a Child Exploitation Safety Planning Meeting is held the safety plan developed should be integrated into the overall plan for the child/young person. For children in care issues raised and actions planned should be incorporated into the child's Care Plan and Placement Plan, and reviewed

as part of the Looked After Child Review. All plans need to be recorded on Azeus and be accessible to colleagues who cover safeguarding arrangements Out of Hours.

Because the experience and potential trauma of child exploitation can last well into adulthood, support may be required over a long period of time. In such circumstances, effective links should be made between children and adult services and statutory and voluntary organisations. For children/young people in care this should be incorporated into their Pathway Plan and Preparation for Adulthood planning

Agencies can support the disruption and prosecution of facilitators and perpetrators by working together to undertake mapping exercises, to gain a shared understanding of friendships, associations, potential perpetrators and locations and contexts of concern. Child exploitation multi-agency mapping exercises should be undertaken in accordance with local protocols and information sharing agreements

Safety mapping exercises which help professionals to understand children/young people's experiences of places in which they feel safe and unsafe in, should be undertaken with children/young people, to support informed multi-agency planning and intervention.

Children in Care can be more vulnerable to exploitation. Foster carers and staff in Children's Homes must be able to recognise the possible indicators of child exploitation, and respond to and share information appropriately, in line with local protocols and procedures.

The child/young person's Independent Reviewing Officer must be informed of any concerns relating to child exploitation or any other form of suspected abuse and consulted about any change in care planning or provision for the child.

Organised and complex meetings

When exploitation has been identified and there are concerns that the abuse involves one or more perpetrators, multiple victims, a group or location where additional focus is required to monitor peer networks and activity, consideration should be given as to whether this falls within the Organised and Complex Abuse procedures as outlined in chapter 8 of the CP procedures, available at www.londoncp.co.uk/organised_complex.html

Professionals from across partner agencies, should be invited to participate in sharing information. Intelligence and information gathered at these meetings should be fed into partner meetings so that a strategic response plan can be developed.

The University of Bedfordshire defines Contextual Safeguarding as, 'an approach to understanding and responding to young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.'

Complex abuse is defined in paragraph 6.24 of Working Together to Safeguard Children as, 'abuse involving one or more abusers and a number of related or non-related abused children and young people. The abusers concerned may be acting in concert to abuse children, sometimes acting in isolation, or may be using an institutional framework or position of authority to recruit children for abuse.'

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#) gives guidance on inter-agency working to enable professionals to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. The document looks more closely at the challenges around contextual safeguarding and identifies the difficulties associated with investigating complex (i.e. organised or multiple) abuse.

Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panel (MACE)

The Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panel (MACE) has strategic oversight of all exploitation cases (including Newham children in care placed out of borough), information, intelligence and activity across Newham. A Pre-MACE meeting is held to determine which individual children's cases will be discussed at the subsequent MACE Panel – social workers will be contacted 5 days before the panel to provide a brief update on progress.

Cases involving children/young people who are at imminent risk, should not wait for the MACE meeting. The MACE process runs alongside safeguarding processes to ensure all information in relation to child exploitation is collated at a central point.

Children transitioning into adulthood

Exploitation can affect vulnerable adults equally and it is important there is an effective and robust referral process. There must be a strong relationship between CYPS and Adults Social Care and Probation so that those who provide the appropriate services and support for these young adults are given the right information and opportunities to implement suitable safety plans. These same principles should be followed in cases where young people leaving care or have special educational needs and or disability are considered to be at risk of abuse through exploitation. The pathway plan should specifically identify their vulnerability to exploitation, address the factors known to impede successful recovery from exploitation (e.g. homelessness, poverty, lack of educational and employment opportunities and lack of supportive social contacts) and identify actions to increase safety and reduce risk.

Where the young person is over 18 years of age but there are concerns related to exploitation, consideration will need to be given as to whether threshold has been met to trigger a s.42 Adult Safeguarding Enquiry. This decision must be made by Adult Social Care via a referral to the Adult MASH.

National Referral Mechanism

The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery to ensure they receive the appropriate support. Modern slavery may involve multiple forms of exploitation and includes human trafficking, slavery, servitude, and forced or compulsory labour. Victims may not be aware that they are being trafficked or exploited, and may have consented to elements of their exploitation, or accepted their situation. If a professional assesses that modern slavery has taken place, the case should be referred to the NRM so that the Single Competent Authority (SCA) can fully consider the case. As a local authority, Newham is considered as a First Responder therefore a referral to the NRM should be made in all cases where a child/young person is considered to be experiencing exploitation. For children/young people under 18, consent is not required to make a referral.

To make a referral visit: <https://www.modernslavery.gov.uk/start>