

Adolescent Safety and Wellbeing Strategy 2026-31

**Our plan to prevent, identify and respond to the exploitation of
children and young people in Barking and Dagenham**

Executive Summary

This strategy sets out how we will prevent, identify and respond to the exploitation of children and young people in Barking and Dagenham over the next five years. Our vision is:

“That all children and young people are safe from exploitation and supported to thrive in their families, communities and futures.”

Child exploitation is a form of abuse. It is when someone uses a child for financial gain, sexual gratification, labour or personal advantage. Victims and survivors have highlighted the trauma, and long-lasting emotional harm exploitation can cause. Abuse can result in violence and physical harm and has wider impacts on people's lives. The ripple effect of exploitation impacts families and communities.

National publications in recent years have highlighted the need for change. They point to the importance of early help, identification and intervention, of engagement with children and families, and taking a child-centred, trauma-informed, anti-discriminatory approach to supporting children and young people. Victims and survivors nationally have highlighted the importance of being listened to, believed, and involved in decision-making. Locally, young people and families have highlighted the importance of committed, caring, tenacious staff and engaged parents in making a difference.

This strategy seeks to improve our response as a partnership to exploitation and adolescent safety, with four priorities that each have a key set of commitments.

1. Prevent exploitation before it happens

- Work as a partnership to address the wider determinants of exploitation
- Develop safe spaces and places
- Raise the awareness and understanding of exploitation
- Improve safety with young people, families and communities
- Identify and address emerging risks

2. Early information and support

- Better insights, understanding and action
- Strengthen early, family help
- Child-first, consistent approach to identification

3. Respond, disrupt and reduce harm

- Strengthen the 'risk outside the home' pathway
- Challenge inequality and discrimination
- Information sharing
- Child-first practice
- Working with parents and carers as partners
- Strengthened disruption
- Adapt with the changing profile of harm

4. Support young people and families to recover and thrive

- Support young people to recover
- Understand the impact of support
- Support families to recover
- Support young people to thrive
- Support into adulthood

We are committed as a partnership to the eight multi-agency practice principles published by Research in Practice on child exploitation: The principles will be put into practice through the commitments in this strategy.

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1. Introduction

This strategy sets out how we will prevent, identify and respond to the exploitation of children and young people in Barking and Dagenham over the next five years. Our vision is:

“That all children and young people are safe from exploitation and supported to thrive in their families, communities and futures”

This strategy sets out our priorities and commitments to continuously improve our approach to risk outside the home and exploitation. It sets out eight principles that will guide our work, and four key priorities held across the partnership of the local authority, health, Police, education and beyond, which are:

- 1. Prevent exploitation before it happens
- 2. Early information and support
- 3. Respond, disrupt and reduce harm
- 4. Support young people and families to recover and thrive

The strategy will be accompanied by an annual plan, setting out the actions each organisation will take individually and collectively. The strategy will be delivered through the Strategic Adolescent Safety and Wellbeing Group, overseen by both the Community Safety Partnership Board and Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children’s Partnership.

2. What is child exploitation?

Child exploitation is a form of abuse. It is when someone uses a child for financial gain, sexual gratification, labour or personal advantage. The exploitation of children can take a number of different forms and perpetrators may subject children and young people to multiple forms of abuse at the same time¹. These forms of exploitation include:

- Criminal exploitation: This is a form of abuse where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child under the age of 18 in any criminal activity. It includes County Lines, which is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs.
- Sexual exploitation: This is a form of abuse 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.
- Financial exploitation: Financial exploitation is the illegal, improper, or unauthorized use of a person’s money, property, or assets. It often involves coercing, deceiving, or manipulating someone into handing over funds or facilitating illicit activities like money laundering.
- Grooming: When someone builds an emotional connection with a child or young person to gain their trust so that they can be sexually abused, exploited, or trafficked.
- Modern slavery and trafficking: Child trafficking is the practice of transporting children into, within and out of the UK or any other country for the purposes of exploitation.

A full definition of each of these terms and other key terms is included in Appendix I.

¹ Definition source: [Child exploitation disruption toolkit - GOV.UK](#)

3. Why we need an adolescent safety and wellbeing strategy

- 3.1 The strategy seeks to prevent and address the harm exploitation has on children, families and communities. Research highlights the trauma and long-lasting emotional harm child exploitation can cause. Abuse can result in physical harm, as well as an increased risk of substance use and self-harm and can ultimately result in loss of life. Exploitation also has wider impacts on people's lives, including an increased likelihood of missing education and poorer education outcomes². Young people and adults may find it harder to access and stay in education, employment or training; and the legacy of exploitation can continue to impact their adult lives.

Families also experience harm. Parents and carers can face significant stress, fear and helplessness; and the relationship with the child being exploited can become strained or break down³. The impacts can also extend out to siblings and wider networks.

The ripple of child exploitation widens out to include local communities. Communities might feel less safe, with fears around violence and exploitative activity in their local area and online.

- 3.2 The strategy aims to further strengthen our response to the exploitation of children. Historically, child safeguarding activity has focused on risks within the home. However, this has changed over time, with an increased understanding that children and young people can experience risk and harm outside the family, including neighbourhoods, peer groups and online spaces. This is particularly pertinent for adolescents, who have greater independence and different interactions outside the home. National government and public services have developed a more detailed understanding of exploitation and the need for an improved response, detailed in Section 4.
- 3.3 The strategy aims to ensure we continue to respond to the changing profile of exploitation and that we continue to learn and act on insights. Online and technology-driven risks, for example, continue to evolve, underlining the need to continually understand and respond to these. Work is ongoing at a national and local level to understand more about child exploitation and the organisational response to this. At the time of writing, this includes the Statutory Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs, and Operation Beaconport to review historical, closed child sexual abuse cases.

4. The voice of children and families

- 4.1 Nationally, victims and survivors of child exploitation consistently describe profound and long-lasting impacts of exploitation on their emotional wellbeing, relationships, education, physical safety, and sense of identity. Many report experiencing trauma, fear, anxiety, depression, shame, and lasting impacts on relationships.

² Source: [The education experiences of young people experiencing child criminal and sexual exploitation - Lloyd - 2025 - British Educational Research Journal - Wiley Online Library](#)

³ Source: [I'm Trying to Save My Family: Parent Experiences of Child Criminal Exploitation - Nina Maxwell, 2023](#)

4.2 The importance of being seen as both a child and a victim has been highlighted in feedback. Victims and survivors want to see services identify exploitation at an early stage, with greater professional curiosity, trauma-informed support, and services that build trusting relationships over time. They highlight the importance of being listened to, believed, involved in decisions affecting them, and receiving coordinated support that addresses both immediate safety and longer-term recovery.

4.3 In Barking and Dagenham, we always ask young people ‘what made the difference’ and brought about change at the end of an exploitation episode. Young people have highlighted tenacious social workers who care, committed youth justice workers, engaged parents and restorative interventions as critical issues.

4.4 We also have insights on how children understand and view safety and exploitation risks in the borough. In a survey carried out in spring 2026, most respondents (57%) reported feeling safe. Most young people would tell a parent/carer, teacher or friend if they were worried about their safety, and a significant proportion would tell a police officer or a member of a faith group.

Exploitation (described as ‘being tricked, pressured or taken advantage of’) was highlighted by young people as a topic young people need to know more about. Young people were asked to describe in their own words what the biggest safety issues are for children in the borough, with gangs and knife crime being the most frequent responses. Young people suggested a greater police presence, not being alone or being with family to help young people feel safer. Both the Barking and Dagenham annual Children’s Safety Summit and in a spring 2026 focus group, young people felt aware of the importance of online safety and safety from exploitation but felt this needed ongoing for education and support, particularly for those facing barriers such as language or digital literacy. to stay up to date with emerging trends and new risks. They recommended using real-life stories from people with lived experience when raising awareness of exploitation. The increased willingness among young people to seek help from trusted adults was encouraging. However, building further trust in reporting mechanisms remains essential to ensure they feel safe and supported when voicing their concerns. They suggested for all schools to have an app or website to report safety concerns anonymously. Parks and transportation hubs are frequently identified as unsafe. This underscores the ongoing need to address environmental factors like lighting, CCTV, police presence and the inclusion of young people in the planning and implementation process.

5. The profile of children and perpetrators

5.1 Research is clear that any child can be a victim of criminal or sexual exploitation. However, insights into child exploitation risk factors can support targeted prevention and early help. Some of the factors that may heighten a person’s vulnerability include:

- Prior abuse in the family
- Economic deprivation
- Homelessness or insecure housing
- Substance use
- Physical disability, learning disability or neurodiversity
- Mental health issues
- Exclusion from mainstream education
- Being in or leaving care.

Contact with the criminal justice system and insecure immigration status can heighten the risk of criminal exploitation, as this along with the factors listed above can “give rise to the imbalance of power which perpetrators often seek to abuse⁴”.

- 5.2 Research suggests most perpetrators involved in sexually exploiting children are men⁵. Most victims are girls, with one report citing an estimated 88% of child sexual exploitation victims as female⁶. This can be seen as part of a wider picture of gender-based violence, linked to inequality and misogyny. At the same time, research notes that the sexual exploitation of boys may be under-reported and identified, impacted by gender norms and expectations.
- 5.3 Perpetrators of child criminal exploitation can be individuals or people linked to organised crime groups or gangs. Most victims are boys, aged between 12-17 years old. Girls may be under-identified as their experience may be less visible and be impacted by gender norms and expectations.
- 5.4 In Barking and Dagenham, boys and children of a Black ethnic background were overrepresented in child criminal exploitation. Children of Black backgrounds made up 25% of the under 18 population in the 2021 Census but made up 39% of those with an open episode of criminal exploitation. Children of a mixed heritage of ‘White Other’ background were also overrepresented, making up 10% and 10% of the under 18 population respectively, and 16% and 17% of criminal exploitation episodes. Over 2025-26, 85% of children with an open episode of criminal exploitation were boys and 15% were girls.
- 5.5 In Barking and Dagenham, girls and children of a White British ethnic background were overrepresented in child sexual exploitation. Children of a White British background made up 22% of the under 18 population in the 2021 Census but made up 35% of those with an open episode of sexual exploitation. Children of a mixed heritage are also overrepresented, making up 10% of the under 18 population and 17% of sexual exploitation episodes. 95% of children with an open child sexual exploitation episode over 2025-6 were girls.
- 5.6 The overrepresentation locally of boys in criminal exploitation and of girls in sexual exploitation is mirrored nationally. In terms of ethnicity, the evidence base is not as robust, and there are challenges when comparing the local picture for White British children with national averages because the national average conceals a large degree of variation between areas. In addition, several reports point to the risk and impact of ‘adulthoodification’, whereby children are viewed as older than they are with potential vulnerabilities missed as a result; and that Black children are disproportionately impacted by this⁷.

6. The national picture

- 6.1 There is no single evidence base on the prevalence of child exploitation. There are indications that recorded instances of exploitation have increased overall in recent years, however research suggests that this is likely to be an underestimate of the true picture. Since our last strategy in 2023, a range of legislation, policy reports and guidance have increased the focus on child exploitation and have both driven improvements and highlighted the need for more.

⁴ [Source](#)

⁵ Nation Audit [report](#), [Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse](#)

⁶ [Source](#)

⁷ [Source](#)

- 6.2 [Multi-agency responses to serious youth violence](#) (November 2024) sets out findings from six Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs) carried out over 2024. It suggests that targeted interventions are needed for children who are disproportionately at risk of harm. The report highlights the importance of addressing the impact of abuse, of engaging with children and families, and the importance of violence reduction units.
- 6.3 [The Jay Review of Criminally Exploited Children](#) (March 2024) identifies eight key lessons for services, including the importance of having a clear definition of criminal exploitation, treating children as victims rather than criminals, the need for better data and early intervention, and the importance of schools as a protective factor.
- 6.4 [The Crime and Policing Bill](#) (2026) will create a standalone offence to prosecute adults committing child criminal exploitation. New child criminal exploitation civil prevention orders will be available at the end of criminal proceedings to prevent further exploitative action.
- 6.5 The Online Safety Act (2023) introduces a range of new duties designed to help protect children online. Platforms have a legal duty to protect children online, including from online grooming. The Act introduces new offences, including a specific [cyberflashing offence](#), and criminalises sharing or threatening to share intimate images without consent. In spring 2026, the government [announced](#) a ban on social media for under 16s and the restriction of certain harmful features on other online services for under 18s.
- 6.6 [Child sexual exploitation: Learning from case reviews](#) (August 2023) sets out learning from a sample of case reviews published between 2014-23 where child sexual exploitation was a key factor. The report highlights that professionals can face difficulties identifying CSE and protect children from further abuse, that interventions should be child-centred and trauma-informed, that information should be shared between relevant professionals in a timely manner and that children should be supported throughout an investigation into child sexual exploitation.
- 6.7 [National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) (June 2025) sets out audit findings on group-based child sexual exploitation by 'grooming gangs'. The report highlights that there are persistent issues for agencies to address, relating to information sharing, the need for more training, understanding the risk factors of victims, and the importance of collecting better data and information on perpetrators. The report recommends more data is needed on the ethnicity of perpetrators and offender motivations, concluding that there has been an avoidance of ethnicity issues and an ambivalent attitude to adolescent girls.
- 6.8 [Independent Inquiry into Grooming Gangs](#) (announced 2025). A three-year statutory independent inquiry focusing on grooming gangs has been commissioned, following a recommendation in the national audit report (above). The inquiry is expected to conclude in 2029.
- 6.9 [Operation Beaconport](#) (announced 2025). The National Crime Agency is leading a national review of group-based child sexual investigations that were made between 2021 and 2025, that involved two or more suspects and have been closed.
- 6.10 In addition, the following publications are relevant to the strategy:
 - [Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines](#) (2017) that provides guidance for frontline staff on county lines exploitation.

- [Serious Violence Duty](#) (2022) that sets out statutory guidance and a new duty for local authorities and services together to collaborate, plan, prevent and reduce serious youth violence.
- The [Families First Partnership Programme Guide](#) (March 2025) that sets out delivery expectations for safeguarding partners in relation to the Families First Partnership programme.
- [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) (updated March 2026) that sets out three enablers as the foundation to good practice in children's social care, and four outcomes that children's social care should achieve for the children, young people and families they support.
- [Tackling Child Exploitation Practice Principles](#) (March 2026, Research in Practice) provide eight multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm to support effective partnership work. These are described in more detail in a future section.

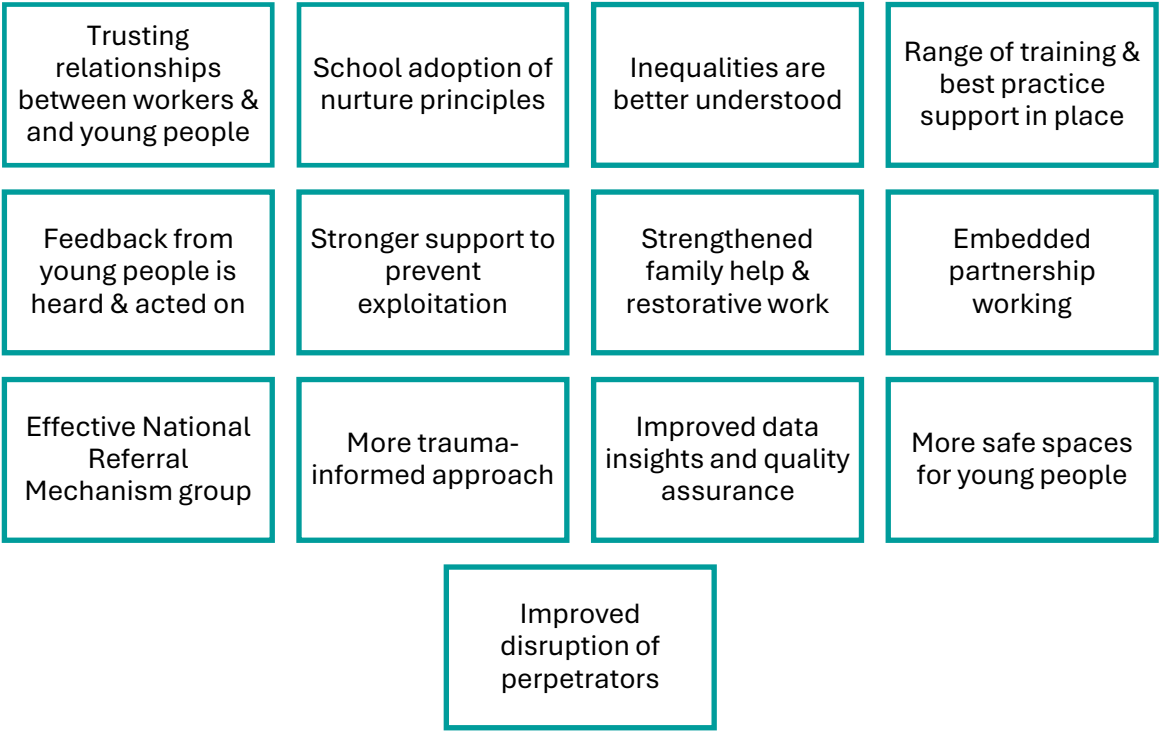
7. The regional picture

- 7.1 London-wide commitments to tackling child exploitation and strengthening the identification and response to this are reflected in Mayor of London and Metropolitan Police commitments.
- 7.2 The [Met Police Children's Strategy](#) includes commitments to improve the use of data, increase capacity in the child exploitation teams and increase the number of prosecutions for exploitation cases that do not rely on child victims to give testimony. The Police will work in partnership with law enforcement and tech companies to tackle online perpetrators of child abuse and improve victim support for those impacted by online abuse.
- 7.3 [The Mayor's Police and Crime Plan](#) (2025-29) has the reduction of violence and criminal exploitation as one of the four aims of the plan. The plan includes commitments to take a child-first approach, expand specialist help and recovery support, focus on early identification of at-risk children, supporting stronger multi-agency working, addressing root causes and improving the police response.
- 7.4 Pan-London Safeguarding Procedures have been updated to confirm that children moved by one local authority to another borough for safety reasons, the first local authority must hold case responsibility for three months. The Met are updating the Pan London Procedures; the new version will include an expectation that local Children's safeguarding boards will report annually to the London Adolescent safeguarding oversight board (LASOB) details of prevalence and response to tackling exploitation in their areas. The LASOB as released the latest SAIL (Safeguarding adolescents in London) Digital Guidance to support best practice.
<https://www.liia.london/SAIL/homepage-safeguarding-adolescents-in-london/>

8. The local picture and progress in the last three years

- 8.1 Barking and Dagenham is an outer London borough characterised by its young, diverse, growing population. There was 18% population growth between 2011 and 2021, and there are high levels of population 'churn' with families moving in and out of the borough. 25% of all residents were aged 16 or under in the 2021 Census, representing the highest proportion in England.

- 8.2 Some of the factors that can increase vulnerability to exploitation are present in our borough. Children and families can face persistent inequalities, and deprivation levels are high: 42% of children are estimated to live in poverty, the fifth highest in London.
- 8.3 In children’s social care, 20 new child sexual exploitation ‘flags’ were opened and 27 were closed over 2025-6. 65 children were risk-assessed over the year. 69 new criminal exploitation ‘flags’ were opened, and 39 were closed. 118 children were risk-assessed over the year.
- 8.4 Our last Adolescent Safety and Wellbeing Strategy covered 2023-26, and since that time, progress has been made in number of areas. These are summarised below:



- 8.5 A key achievement in the last year has been our **Risk Outside the Home (ROTH) pathway**, which enables practitioners to identify and respond to extra-familial exploitation. We took learning and best practice from University of Durham to develop our approach and worked closely with Child Protection Conference Chairs before launching the ROTH pathway in summer 2025. Since then, our Vulnerable Adolescent Practice Lead has led over 20 workshops to equip staff to effectively use the pathway, and feedback and audits have found this is having a positive impact. As of March 2026, 13 children have been discussed at ROTH conferences, and learning is shared with all Child Protection Conference chairs.

Exploitation risk assessment tools are well-used, following increased oversight of timeliness and completion by our senior leadership team. Our Vulnerable Adolescent Practice Lead authorises every risk assessment and has also seen improvements in quality and timeliness. A single exploitation risk assessment has recently been launched to strengthen this further.

Audits have given us a richer picture and driven improvements. For example, a deep dive into global majority children with open child sexual exploitation episodes has informed ongoing exploitation training, which now has a bigger emphasis on adultification and family histories. Learning from child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation audits has strengthened joint work in this area, leading to additional training on ‘curiosity in practice’ and ‘let’s talk about sex’.

There has been interest across London authorities to adopt our ROTH pathway as a means to ensure greater consistency as we all implement the new multi-agency child protection teams (MACPT) under the Families first reform roll out.

- 8.6 As a partnership, monthly **Multi-Agency Child Exploitation** (MACE) meetings are effective in reducing children’s vulnerability to exploitation and improving safety and outcomes. Meetings focus on all forms of exploitation and consider victims, offenders, location and trends, leading to targeted interventions.
- 8.7 Our multi-agency **National Referral Mechanism** Devolved Decision-Making Panel is recognised nationally as one of the most successful in the Home Office pilot. Since its launch in 2021, 265 children have been considered, with almost 80% receiving positive Conclusive Grounds decisions. Meetings are well-attended and we continue to learn and evolve with the support of our NRM coordinator.

9. Our practice principles

- 9.1 We are committed as a partnership to the eight multi-agency practice principles recently published by Research in Practice. The principles support responses to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. They act as a compass to ensure that multi-agency safeguarding approaches remain child-centred and effective. They are aligned to the CARES values in children’s social care, which are focused on compassion, accountability, respect, empowerment and sharing. The practice principles run through the priorities and actions in the strategy and are as follows:



10. Priorities

Priority 1: Prevent exploitation before it happens

We will:

- Work as a partnership to address the wider determinants of exploitation

Tackling poverty, adverse experiences and inequality require a system-wide response, and work is taking place across the local authority and partnership to address this. We will join up with wider initiatives including the Child Poverty Strategy and work to ensure children get the best start in life so that this considers the exploitation of children.

- Develop safe spaces and places

The importance of trusted adults has been highlighted by children, families and communities. We will work with the Police and enforcement staff to build police presence where needed, including via Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

We have heard that feeling safe on public transport and transport hubs is an area to improve. We will engage more with Transport for London and with young people themselves to help progress this.

Joint work with colleagues will take place to strengthen safe spaces, including parks and via regeneration plans. We will engage more with the voluntary and community sector, local businesses and faith settings to identify safe spaces, and promote these so young people know where to go if feeling unsafe.

Safe spaces and places need to be available at the right time. We will work with colleagues to look at out-of-hours, positive activities that are available after school and in school holidays.

- Raise the awareness and understanding of exploitation

We will continue to raise awareness of safety and exploitation risks for children and families and have heard from children that they feel they need to know more. We will continue to work with education partners on this, recognising the key role schools and colleges play. We will also work closely with young people themselves to raise awareness and understanding.

Professional understanding of exploitation is key so that risks can be minimised or avoided. We will continue as a partnership to provide training to our staff, updating this as risks evolve and change.

- Improve safety with young people, families and communities

We need to continually understand how safe young people and families feel and what would support them to feel safer. We will look at how children can raise concerns anonymously to schools in all settings, understand and improve support with Young Safeguarders, and work more closely with parent and carer forums.

We will strengthen our engagement with faith settings, the community and voluntary sector and communities. We want to develop a network of 'community guardians' who are in the local community and help safeguard children against exploitation.

- Identify and address emerging risks

We will collect richer local insights to identify emerging risks. This includes closer working with TfL, schools and colleges, school nurses and with mental health support teams to understand the local picture in more detail.

We will continue to learn from national and regional research and evidence to understand how to adapt to emerging risks, including online and digital risks. We will also respond to national policy change – including the anticipated social media ban – to strengthen our approach.

Priority 2: Early identification and support

We will:

- Better insights, understanding and action

We want to develop our data and have more robust ‘heat mapping’ to be able to triangulate insights, identify issues locally and take swift, targeted action.

With a high number of children and families moving into the borough, we will also strengthen joint work so that we know at an early stage of new families who may need support.

- Strengthen early, family help

Through our Families First Partnership programme, we will strengthen multi-agency early help to families with adolescent children. We will work with parents and carers to address the risk of family breakdown, and to support families with any wider needs.

We will also strengthen the ‘Young Futures Prevention Partnership Panel’ and our ‘stop and search’ pilot to strengthen our early help offer.

- Child-first, consistent approach to identification

We need everyone across the partnership to understand the signs and indicators of exploitation in order to support children and families at the earliest opportunity. As part of this, we will build knowledge of financial exploitation and violence fixation. There also needs to be a shared and clear set of definitions and thresholds across the partnership, which we will build through the introduction of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs) through the Families First Partnership programme.

We will work through the Young Futures panel and ‘stop and search’ pilot to identify exploitation at an earlier stage. We will include the indicators of exploitation in the ‘continuum of need’ document in children’s care and support, which supports staff to assess and identify need and match that need to the right service response. We will further embed the Philomena Protocol so that Police and placement response to children who go missing continues to improve.

We want children to consistently be seen and supported as victims – not criminals - with their voice and experience at the centre. We will continually seek to address any barriers to identification, including adultification and other barriers resulting from sex, race, gender identity, sexual orientation and disability. We want staff to be curious, with the confidence to talk to young people about sex and relationships, and with an awareness of the impact of trauma.

Priority 3: Respond, disrupt and reduce harm

We will:

- Strengthen the ‘risk outside the home’ pathway

When exploitation is identified, we will act quickly to respond and with a shared understanding of the thresholds that frame this.

A key priority over the next five years is to embed and extend the 'risk outside the home' pathway and conferencing. We will roll out the pathway across wider children's care and support and include partners and colleagues in community safety and housing and others so that we are working effectively as a partnership to keep children safe outside the home. We will support young people and families before and during the conference to enable meaningful participation, and work with advocates.

- Challenge inequality and discrimination

We will continually focus on how well our response to exploitation is meeting the needs of all our young people and families. Our staff will be supported to understand the intersections of young people's identity to fully respond to and challenge inequality.

We will learn and take action from insights, including a thematic review into girls with complex needs at risk of exploitation.

We will continue our commitment to anti-racism, challenging adultification and challenging misogyny. We will seek to improve our understanding and response to Eastern European, neurodiverse and LGBTQ+ young people who have experienced exploitation or are at risk of this.

We will improve data and insights so we know how our communities are changing and what young people are experiencing, and we will strengthen how equalities information is reported so that we have a holistic view and drive improvements as a result.

- Information sharing

We will improve information sharing between organisations to better respond, disrupt and reduce harm. We will review the systems we use to record and share data, so that all relevant organisations have the information they need to respond to each child. We will use the development of Multi-Agency Child Protection teams (MACPT) to improve the consistency of reporting.

With a significant number of children moving between boroughs, we also want to improve the sharing of data between London local authorities and understanding children's connections, relationships and links across areas.

- Child-first practice

We are committed to ensuring every child is put first, with their voice at the centre. Putting this into practice means children's voices and views being heard and meaningfully considered, with an individualised approach using child-friendly language and consistently avoiding victim-blaming language. It means putting a team around the child, with a lead professional established through families First partnership and Multi-Agency Child Protection teams.

We will support and equip staff to work in this way. This includes skills-based training on engaging with young people and what professional curiosity means in practice.

The child-first approach extends to managers and oversight of exploitation. We will respect the voice and expertise of children at our Multi-Agency Child Exploitation meetings and Adolescent Safety and Wellbeing Strategic Group, develop a 'you said, we did' approach to evidence how feedback has made a difference.

- Working with parents and carers as partners

We will work with parents and carers as partners when responding to exploitation. We will strengthen our restorative intervention approach, including through use of parent advocates. We will embed family genograms and family group meetings, so that the wider family is understood and that families are engaged as equal partners.

- Strengthened disruption

We will work to disrupt the perpetrators of exploitation. We will improve the identification of adults in incidents, explore with Police the full range of powers available to them and how these are being utilised and ensure the disruption toolkit is consistently used. Data on perpetrators will be strengthened, learning from other approaches including the 'V100' approach to identifying the highest harm domestic violence offenders. We will advocate for victims and support them in relation to court delays.

- Adapt with the changing profile of harm

Our response to exploitation will need to adapt as the profile changes and as we learn and improve. This includes adapting our approach as online harm risks change, and agreeing a response, pathway and guidance in relation to violence-fixated people and radicalisation.

Priority 4: Support young people and families to recover and thrive

We will:

- Support young people to recover

We will work across the partnership to support young people to recover from exploitation. We will raise awareness of what is available, including for children who use substances and/or have mental health issues. We will increase referrals to the London Violence and Exploitation Support Service so that more children get support.

We will support our staff to work in a trauma-informed way, putting the voices of people with lived experience at the heart of training. We will develop how staff recognise trauma arising from racism, poverty, social exclusion; and vicarious trauma. Through the introduction of Multi-Agency Child Protection teams, we will try and prevent young people having to 'retell their story' to different professionals.

We will also improve the understanding of substance use and trauma as interrelated issues and develop a more holistic response to dual diagnosis.

- Understand the impact of support

We want to have a better understanding of the impact of support so that we continue what works and change what doesn't. We will develop a mechanism for measuring the outcomes for exploited children with this in mind, using multi-agency data, case audits, and putting the views of the young person at the centre.

- Support families to recover

We will support parents, carers, siblings and wider family to recover from the impact of exploitation. This includes improving the identification and response to siblings, and improving the take-up of parental support offers, such as via the Ben Kinsella Trust and early help.

- Support young people to thrive

We will work across the partnership to support young people to achieve the things that are important to them. We will challenge the stigmatising narratives that can impact young people, and advocate for social inclusion.

We will support children to stay in education, and to engage in positive social activities. We will commission services that have a proven record of making a positive difference in young people's

lives. We will improve how peer group mapping is used in social care so that it includes a focus on the young person’s strengths.

We will work with young people and communities to support others, through the introduction of peer champions and more roles for volunteers.

- Support into adulthood

We will support young people to prepare for adulthood, and into the transition to adult life and services. As part of this, we will define and strengthen our approach to transitional safeguarding and continue to be ambitious for our children and young people.

11. Measures that matter

Priority	Measure
Prevent exploitation before it happens:	- Level of public and professional awareness-raising activity - Number of community guardians - Feedback from children, young people and adults on feelings of safety and awareness of exploitation - Feedback from professionals on prevention impacts
Early identification and support	- Improved data reports - Improved heat mapping - Delivery measures associated with the Families First Partnership programme - family help - Use of family early help services and level of engagement - Feedback from children, young people and adults - Feedback from professionals - Insights from audits on the quality of practice - Commissioned provider contract reports evidencing impact and outcomes
Respond, disrupt and reduce harm	- Increased use of ROTH conferencing - Disproportionality reduces for protected characteristics - Improved information sharing / data reports - Delivery measures associated with the Families First Partnership programme – MACPTs and family group conferences - Use of advocacy - Staff training data - Police disruption reporting and Criminal justice outcomes - Feedback from children, young people and adults - Feedback from professionals - Insights from audits on the quality of practice - Insights from NRM panel and Return home interviews
Support young people and families to recover and thrive	- Number of referrals to and engagement with support - Improved outcomes from young people and families - Feedback from children, young people and adults - Feedback from professionals - Insights from audits on the quality of practice - Partner reports on quality and impact of practice

12. Governance and monitoring

- 12.1 The strategy will be accompanied by an annual plan, setting out the actions each organisation will take individually and collectively. The strategy will be delivered through the Strategic Adolescent Safety and Wellbeing Group, overseen by both the Community Safety Partnership Board and Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children’s Partnership.
- 12.2 The views and experiences of young people and families will be central to understanding how well this strategy is being delivered. As such, we will continually review and develop new mechanisms to gather feedback from young people and families on their experiences and ensure insights are used to monitor progress and drive improvements.
- 12.3 This strategy will interface with the following other key strategies and work:
- The Community Safety Partnership Plan: This strategy will support delivery of the CSP priorities relating to child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, serious youth violence and contextual safeguarding, ensuring a consistent multi-agency response.
 - The Serious Violence Strategy: The strategy contributes directly to the borough’s Serious Violence Duty responsibilities through strengthened partnership working, earlier identification of vulnerability, improved data sharing and coordinated prevention activity.
 - The Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Board plan and priorities: This strategy will support delivery of safeguarding priorities. These include exploitation as an explicit priority for 2026-7/
 - The Youth Justice Plan: The strategy contributes to the priorities in the strategy around support to victims, reducing first time entrants and strengthening our approach to equality and diversity and participation.
 - The Victim Strategy for Youth Justice. The strategy contributes to the priorities in the strategy around providing support that is consistently respectful and caring to victims and their families, improving communication, information and advice to victims and families, strengthening joint work and strengthening joint work with victims, families and communities to improve what we do.
 - The Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. This strategy is aligned to tackling violence against women and girls, recognising the sexual exploitation of girls as part of a wider picture of gender-based violence, linked to inequality and misogyny
 - The Corporate Parenting Strategy (due to be agreed in September 2026). The strategy contributes to the updated draft promises in the Corporate Parenting Strategy. Likewise, the Corporate Parenting Strategy includes a commitment to strengthen the partnership approach to exploitation and risk outside the home, recognising that care experienced young people can be at a higher risk of exploitation.

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Appendix I: Definitions

The below section set out the definitions of various forms of exploitation and related terminology used when speaking about young people at risk of such harm.

Child criminal exploitation (CCE): A form of child abuse, where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child 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 has been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual (Home Office, 2018)

County Lines: County Lines is where illegal drugs are transported from one area to another, often across police and local authority boundaries (although not exclusively), usually by children or vulnerable people who are coerced into it by gangs. The 'County Line' is the mobile phone line used to take the orders of drugs. Areas where drugs are taken to report increased violence and weapons-related crimes because of this trend.

A term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. (NCA)

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 (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. (DfE, 2017)

Financial Exploitation: Financial exploitation is the illegal, improper, or unauthorized use of a person's money, property, or assets. It often involves coercing, deceiving, or manipulating someone—especially vulnerable adults or children—into handing over funds or facilitating illicit activities like money laundering.

Financially Motivated Sexual Extortion (FMSE): An exploiter threatening to release nude or semi-nude images and/or videos of a child or young person, unless they pay money, or meet another financial demand, such as purchasing a pre-paid gift card.

Grooming: When someone builds an emotional connection with a child or young person to gain their trust so that they can be sexually abused, exploited, or trafficked. Children and young people can be groomed online or face-to-face, by a stranger or by someone they know - for example a family member, friend or professional. Anybody can be a groomer, no matter their age, gender, or race. Grooming can take place over a short or long period of time – from weeks to years. Groomers may also build a relationship with the young person's family or friends to make them seem trustworthy or authoritative. (NSPCC)

Human Trafficking: The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons ('Palermo Protocol') provided (Article 3) the first internationally recognised definition of human trafficking: "Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having

control of another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery, or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs.”

Child Trafficking, Slavery and Forced Labour: Child trafficking is the practice of transporting children into, within and out of the UK or any other country for the purposes of exploitation. The exploitation can be varied and include:

- domestic servitude.
- labour exploitation.
- criminal activity (e.g., cannabis cultivation, drug supply through county lines, petty street crime, illegal street trade, etc.).
- sexual exploitation (child abuse, closed community, child abuse images).
- application of residence.
- benefit fraud.
- forced begging.
- illegal adoption; and
- sham marriage.

Where there is an arrangement made to travel, or to facilitate travel with a view to child exploitation, section 2 of the 2015 Act should be used. In these circumstances, regard should be had to the victim’s age in determining their vulnerability. If the victim states they are a child, they should be viewed as such until their age can be verified by identification, or an independent age assessment carried out by the local authority or a court determination. Section 51 of the 2015 Act provides for presumption about age. Until an assessment is made of the person’s age by the local authority, there is an assumption.

Contextual Safeguarding: Contextual Safeguarding has been set out as a framework with four parts to articulate what the approach can achieve in your local area. According to the framework, Contextual Safeguarding is evident in a local area if partners are able to:

- Target the contexts in which abuse has occurred.
- Achieve this through the lens of child protection and child welfare: ensure there is a child protection, and not just community safety, response to extra-familial harm.
- Partner with organisations and individuals who could influence the nature of extra-familial contexts.
- Measure contextual, as well as individual, impact.

Transitional safeguarding: An emerging area of policy, not widely applied in practice, which proposes that existing safeguarding systems for children and adults need to become more fluid and more responsive to the dynamic needs of young people and young adults (Homes and Smale 2018).

Transitional safeguarding responds to safeguarding young people and young adults across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children’s and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives. It focuses on safeguarding young people from adolescence into adulthood, recognising transition is a journey not an event, and every young person will experience this journey differently (DHSC 2021)

Cuckooing: The process where adults and/or children are used to take over houses acquired from vulnerable adults including class A drug addicts.

Debt bondage: Children are robbed by members of their own network or are encouraged to run into debt for commodities acquired from the network (e.g., drugs) in order to remain indebted to them.