Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership

Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership

Contextual Safeguarding Strategy 2026-29



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Foreword

We are pleased to present the Pan-Cumbria Contextual Safeguarding Strategy. Protecting children and young people from harm outside the home remains a core priority for Safeguarding Children Partnerships in Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness.

We recognise that there can be additional vulnerabilities for young people aged 18-25, particularly where there has been exploitation previously. Support around this age group will be explored by each Safeguarding Children Partnership and referenced within the respective place-based Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Action Plans.

Contextual safeguarding recognises that risks can arise in places and relationships beyond the family—schools, neighbourhoods, community spaces, transport hubs, the night time economy and online spaces. These extra familial harms can profoundly affect children, young people, families and communities if not addressed collectively and early.

This strategy reflects our shared commitment to prevent harm, disrupt those who exploit or abuse, and create safer environments for all children and young people in Cumbria. It addresses the complex and overlapping nature of extra familial harm, including sexual and criminal exploitation, serious youth violence, modern slavery, harmful sexual behaviour, trafficking, online abuse and risks linked to missing episodes.

Recognising best practice models of Contextual and Transitional Safeguarding, we acknowledge that existing safeguarding systems and commissioning arrangements often operate around a binary distinction between “childhood” and “adulthood” based solely on a person’s biological age. This can result in gaps in protection and support at a critical stage of development. In response, Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness are committed to strengthening a developmentally informed approach that improves continuity of safeguarding and early help for young adults.

In this strategy, the term young people is used to encompass both adolescence and early adulthood, describing individuals up to the age of 25 where safeguarding concerns related to exploitation and extra familial harm remain present. This reflects our ambition to better align services, partnerships and responses with the realities of young people’s lives rather than rigid age thresholds.

We are committed to listening to children, young people, families and communities, learning from their lived experiences and ensuring our workforce has the skills, confidence and resources to respond effectively. By identifying concerns early, acting swiftly and working collectively across agencies, we will strengthen our response to extra familial harm and ensure that help and protection are accessible, proportionate and trauma informed.

Together, we will work to build safer environments, stronger communities and better outcomes for all children and young people in Cumbria.

Purpose

This strategy sets out how partners will work collectively to identify, prevent and respond to risks faced outside the home. It establishes a shared approach to recognising and reducing extra familial harm, ensuring that lived experience and voice shapes local practice. It promotes early identification, timely intervention and effective disruption so that children and young people at risk receive the support they need as early as possible.

Scope

Contextual safeguarding addresses harm occurring outside the family environment, where children and young people may be exposed to risk from adults or peers. As people grow and become more independent, they spend increasing time in schools, peer groups, neighbourhoods, community settings and online spaces—environments that can influence their safety.

This strategy applies to all children and recognises that contextual risks may emerge early in childhood and extend into early adulthood. Transitional safeguarding principles apply where risks persist beyond age 18. The strategy covers the following forms of extra familial harm:

- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE), including coercion into criminal activity and serious youth violence
- County Lines activity and associated coercion, grooming, intimidation or violence
- Online exploitation and abuse, including grooming, manipulation, coercion and abuse in digital spaces
- Group based exploitation and offending involving networks of individuals who facilitate harm
- Child Trafficking and modern slavery
- Missing from home, care or education
- Contextual risks such as home invasion (formerly known as cuckooing) linked to exploitation and extra familial control

The strategy is informed by research, national guidance and learning from reviews, ensuring responses are child centred, trauma informed, non blaming and grounded in strong multi agency collaboration.

Aim

To ensure children and young people vulnerable to exploitation or extra familial harm are effectively identified, protected and supported through a whole system, partnership led approach.

Objective

To implement a cohesive, partnership driven action plan across Cumbria that strengthens existing multi agency working, enhances our collective ability to identify risk early, delivers effective protection and support, and ensures consistent prevention and disruption activity. By working together across all services, we will drive forward the four key priorities of the Child Exploitation Strategy and ensure children are protected from harm.

What the data tells us



According to the Home Office, approximately **15,500** children were identified as at risk of or involved in child criminal exploitation in England in the year ending March 2025, although this is likely to be an underestimate.



According to Research in Practice, exploitation, violence and abuse do not stop at age 18, and risks often increase as safeguarding support reduces or ends.

According to the Department for Education, children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are over represented in exclusion data, increasing vulnerability to exploitation through disrupted education and peer association.



According to the Alliance for Youth Justice, exploited children are at risk of being criminalised rather than protected once they reach adulthood.

According to the Department for Education, **12,120** children in England were assessed as being affected by child sexual exploitation (CSE) in 2025. The majority of children assessed as affected by CSE are aged 10 and over, with high levels of persistent school absence among this group.





According to the National Police Chiefs' Council, children going missing is a fundamental feature of county lines exploitation, as young people are trafficked to deliver drugs and money.

According to the House of Commons Library, transitions to adulthood increase risks for care experienced young people

Key Principles Underpinning our Multi-Agency Strategy

We are committed to:

- Placing safety and welfare at the centre of all work
- Making Cumbria a safe place for children and young people
- Listening to children, young people and families and acting on what they tell us
- Ensuring safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
- Focusing on prevention, early intervention and effective disruption
- Understanding children and young people within the wider context of their lives, including online
- Avoiding criminalisation or blame of victims
- Challenging harmful assumptions and adapting to emerging risks
- Embedding trauma informed practice and the principles of the Lundy Model
- Monitoring and reviewing our work to ensure it makes a positive difference
- Building awareness and understanding of online harm

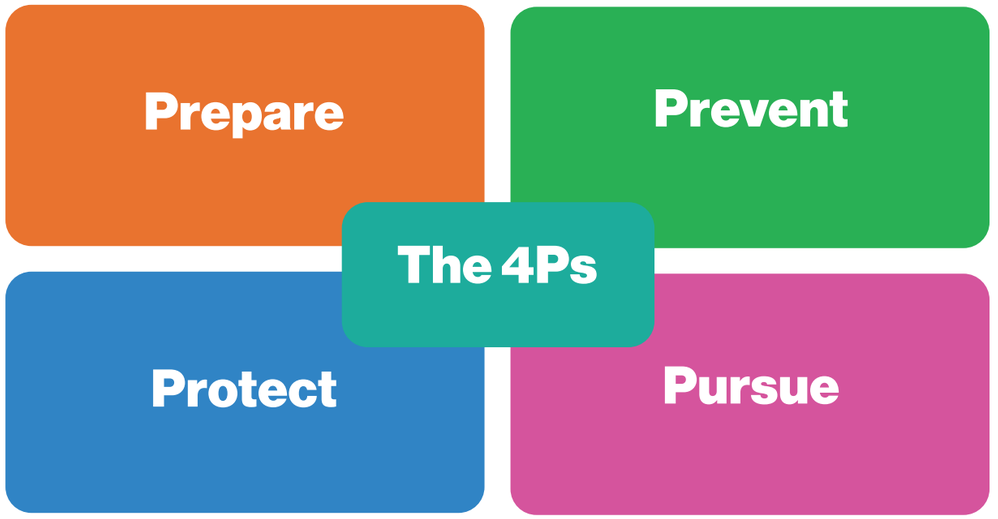
Transitions

Effective transitional safeguarding is essential to ensure that children and young people do not experience a gap in support when they move between services. Contextual risks often continue beyond childhood, and many young adults remain vulnerable to exploitation or harm in community settings, peer groups and other extra familial environments.

Strategic Priorities – The 4P Framework

The 4P framework provides a structured, multi-agency approach to preventing harm and responding to contextual safeguarding and extra-familial harm.

The 4Ps are Prepare, Prevent, Protect, Pursue.







The following table provides more detail about each priority, including how the partnership should aim to make progress in respect of these.

Prepare

Priority	Outcome	Detail
Enable partners and communities to recognise exploitation of children and young people and continuously improve, learn and develop in our response to Exploitation.	1. Improve recognition of exploitation across partners and communities	Partners and community groups will achieve a consistent understanding of the signs, indicators and contexts of exploitation, demonstrated through measurable improvements in knowledge checks, training evaluations and multi agency audit findings.
	2. Ensure all relevant staff and volunteers are trained and confident	All agencies involved in the partnership will ensure their staff and volunteers complete core child exploitation and contextual safeguarding training, with progress monitored through training completion records and post training assessments demonstrating increased confidence and competence.
	3. Strengthen multi agency learning and continuous improvement	The partnership will implement a routine programme of learning reviews, case audits and reflective sessions, with themes and actions captured and used to update practice guidance, training materials and strategic plans. Quality Assurance provides assurance of relevant training and actions against areas identified for development.
	4. Enhance community awareness and participation	Communities, including local businesses, schools, residents and voluntary sector organisations, will be supported through targeted awareness campaigns, briefings and resource packs, with increased community reporting, information sharing and engagement captured as evidence of impact. This includes Operation Make Safe and actions related to this initiative.
	5. Ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities across all partners	All key partners will receive clear role specific guidance outlining expectations in identifying, responding to, and preventing child exploitation, and will evidence their understanding through participation in multi agency processes, information sharing and governance activity.
	6. Strengthen partnership systems that support recognition and response	The partnership will maintain and improve shared systems, tools and practice guidance, ensuring they are used consistently, monitored through audits, and updated in response to learning, data trends and emerging risks. Including ensuring linkage across to the Voluntary Sector Reference Group and the Community Safety Partnership.
	7. Embed the voice of children and young people in all improvement work	The partnership will gather, analyse and act upon children and young people's feedback regarding safety in extra familial contexts, with their insights visibly shaping strategic priorities, resources and practice improvements.
	8. Strengthen education involvement and confidence in dealing with exploitation	Including: • Education representation at the MET sub-groups • Awareness raising about the risks of exploitation and how to seek help • Develop opportunities to discuss healthy relationships
	9. Improve the multi-agency data for Contextual Safeguarding	The partnership needs to improve the dataset by combining all CE performance data to allow a comprehensive overview of performance

Prevent

Priority	Outcome	Detail
Stop people from becoming perpetrators of Exploitation and protect vulnerable young people through early identification, intervention and support.	1. Strengthen early identification of risk factors that lead to exploitation	Partners will consistently use shared screening tools and agreed vulnerability indicators to identify children and young people at risk of exploitation or of developing harmful behaviours, with effectiveness measured through quality audits, referral data and evidence of timely preventative action.
	2. Deliver preventative interventions that reduce vulnerability and build resilience	Children and young people identified as vulnerable will receive timely, evidence informed early help interventions (e.g., mentoring, positive activities, support for families, contextual assessments), with progress tracked through engagement data, improved protective factors and reduced escalation to statutory services.
	3. Reduce the likelihood of young people entering pathways into harmful or exploitative behaviour	Partners will provide diversion and prevention programmes for young people displaying concerning or emerging harmful behaviours, with impact demonstrated through reductions in repeat concerning behaviours, improved school engagement, and reduced involvement in exploitation related activity.
	4. Increase community and professional understanding of early perpetrator indicators	Targeted awareness activity will support professionals and communities to recognise early signs of grooming, coercion and the development of harmful behaviours, with measurable improvements in intelligence submissions, reporting and pre statutory interventions.
	5. Strengthen multi agency responses to individuals showing early signs of posing a risk	Partners will coordinate information and early intervention around individuals who display early warning signs of harmful or exploitative behaviour, evidenced through multi agency planning records, appropriate diversion activity and reduced escalation to criminal or exploitation related behaviour.
	6. Improve access to support for children and young people displaying harmful or concerning sexual, criminal or exploitative behaviours	Children and young people will receive timely assessment and preventative support to address harmful or risky behaviours at the earliest stage, with outcomes monitored through engagement, reduced recurrence of behaviours and increased protective factors.
	7. Embed learning and data analysis to target prevention activity	The partnership will routinely analyse data, trends and learning to identify emerging risks, hotspot locations, and groups of children and young people who may require preventative support, with evidence of targeted action being taken as a result.
	8. Amplify the voices of young people to shape prevention work	Young people's insights, lived experience and feedback will be used to inform and refine prevention approaches, with changes to service design, early help pathways or resources clearly linked to their input.
	9. Return Home Interview Timeliness	Action is needed to improve the timeliness of Return Home Interviews and ensure the key themes are captured fed into MACE and disseminated throughout agencies.
	10. Partners to consider the need for longer term therapeutic input where there is significant trauma	Support and learning for children, young people and families regarding Healthy Relationship. The need for better and more innovative awareness raising about the risks of exploitation and how to seek help The advertising of support services, including clear pathways to access help earlier Explore opportunities for collective support in dealing with exploitation through linkages with other families or organisations such as the Ivison Trust

Protect

Priority	Outcome	Detail
Effective and coordinated responses to safeguard and support victims, families, children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation.	1. Ensure timely and comprehensive safeguarding responses for all at risk	All partners will provide consistent and high quality safeguarding assessments and plans for children and young people at risk of exploitation, measured through multi agency audits, quality assurance activity and evidence of timely decision making.
	2. Strengthen coordinated support for victims and their families	Children, young people and families affected by exploitation will receive clear, coordinated multi agency support plans, with effectiveness evidenced through engagement levels, feedback from children and families, and improved outcomes recorded in case reviews.
	3. Improve the consistency and quality of multi agency information sharing	Relevant information on risks, exploitation patterns and victim vulnerability will be shared promptly and appropriately across agencies, with improvements measured through case audit findings, practitioner feedback and reductions in delays to safeguarding action.
	4. Enhance access to specialist and trauma informed support	Victims of exploitation will have access to trauma informed, specialist services (including therapeutic, advocacy and contextual support), with impact monitored through service uptake data, outcome measures and the voices of children, young people and families.
	5. Strengthen safety planning in extra familial environments	Partners will consistently use contextual safeguarding processes to identify, assess and reduce risks in locations, peer groups and online spaces, with progress evidenced through location assessments, disruption activity and reductions in repeat harm.
	6. Ensure professionals are confident in recognising and responding to exploitation	All practitioners working with children, young people and families will receive regular, role specific training on identifying and responding to exploitation, with confidence and competence measured through evaluations, audits and practitioner surveys.
	7. Embed children and young people's voices in all safeguarding and support planning	Lived experience, preferences and feedback will directly inform intervention plans, review processes and service development, evidenced through recorded child participation, outcome tracking and changes made as a result of their input.
	8. Improve the quality and oversight of multi agency planning meetings	Meetings such as MACE/CE panels will operate consistently to review risk, coordinate interventions and monitor progress, with measurable improvements seen in attendance, quality of action plans and evidence of effective risk reduction.
	9. Review of working processes and protocols based on local learning and scrutiny activity	• Review CE Vulnerability Tracker to ensure it facilitates a robust analysis of risk • Consider aligning CE meetings with other children's services processes and meetings • Improve invites to and attendance at CE meetings • Provide assurance regarding timescales for review meetings • Ensure usage of CE checklist and assurance that it is being used by all agencies to inform decision making

Pursue

Priority	Outcome	Detail
Stop incidents of Exploitation through disrupting, deterring, targeting, pursuing and prosecuting perpetrators.	1. Increase disruption activity against suspected perpetrators	Deliver regular, multi agency disruption actions — including welfare checks, notices, hotspot interventions, and targeted enforcement — to weaken perpetrator networks and reduce opportunities for exploitation. Partnership to seek assurance that disruption is having a positive impact. Agencies to understand their role in reducing risk.
	2. Strengthen intelligence sharing to identify and target perpetrators	Embed consistent cross agency intelligence processes that improve the identification, profiling, and monitoring of individuals who pose a risk of exploitation, ensuring timely actions are taken based on shared information.
	3. Enhance partnership capability to pursue and prosecute perpetrators	Work jointly across police, local authority, and partner agencies to build strong evidential packages — including professional observations and victimless evidence — to support arrests, charges, and successful prosecutions.
	4. Reduce perpetrator access to children and young people through targeted location based interventions	Identify and act on exploitation hotspots by implementing coordinated environmental, safeguarding, and enforcement measures that disrupt perpetrator activity and deter repeated use of those locations.
	5. Improve early identification of emerging perpetrator behaviours	Use screening tools, professional observations, and intelligence submissions to identify emerging perpetrator patterns early, ensuring swift intervention and monitoring to prevent escalation into exploitation.

What is your role in helping us tackle exploitation?

Safeguarding children and young people from exploitation is a collective responsibility shared by all of us—whether you are a council member, strategic leader, frontline practitioner, volunteer, or an active member of your community.

To reflect on your contribution to this duty, consider the following questions:

Individuals

- Do you understand what constitutes sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, modern slavery, and human trafficking? Are you able to recognise the key signs and indicators associated with exploitation for children and young people?
- Do you know where to seek advice or guidance when you have concerns?
- Do you understand how to make a referral for a child or young person at risk?
- Do you actively share your knowledge and expertise with colleagues and partner agencies?
- Are you taking all reasonable steps to safeguard victims and prevent further harm, including referring concerns to the appropriate services?
- If you are a professional, are you familiar with the range and roles of services that support and safeguard those at risk of exploitation?
- As a professional, are you maintaining up to date knowledge of relevant policy, guidance, and best practice?
- Are you encouraged and supported to access appropriate training and professional development opportunities?

Organisations

Are your Executive and Leadership teams fully informed of current issues and responsive to recommendations for improvement?

- Do you actively promote awareness and understanding of contextual safeguarding issues among your workforce and the children and young people they support?
- Are your employees, volunteers, and beneficiaries equipped to recognise the signs of exploitation and aware of the appropriate actions to take?
- Do your services provide timely and effective support and interventions for survivors?
- Do your services meaningfully contribute to prevention and disruption activity and work collaboratively with others to develop shared solutions?
- Are you enabling and supporting effective joint working to strengthen understanding, build knowledge, and share best practice?
- Can your agency evidence that it is able to identify and protect young people at the point of transition to adulthood who may be at risk of exploitation?
- What action does your agency take to support young people where there are contextual safeguarding concerns?

If you answered no to any of the above questions, consider what action you and your organisation could take to better help tackle exploitation and contextual safeguarding concerns.

Accountability and governance

Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnerships and associated lead agencies are committed to establishing and maintaining a culture which does not tolerate exploitation. Cumberland Safeguarding Children Partnership and Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership are committed to working with agencies and young people to identify, respond to and reduce the risks associated with harms outside of the home.

This strategy has been agreed by the Delegated Safeguarding Partners for both Safeguarding Children Partnerships. The strategy sets out the priorities and agrees an approach that enhances our approach to the issue of contextual safeguarding (which includes child exploitation).

Progress against this strategy will be undertaken and monitored by the relevant Contextual Safeguarding group for each Safeguarding Children Partnership with regular updates provided to wider partners.

Performance will be measured, both qualitatively and quantitatively against the strategic objectives and will reflect the strategic priorities referenced throughout this document. Furthermore, it is integral that success against the strategy is measured by considering the experience of children and their families and the difference made to their lives.

To ensure that any emerging issues, legislative, process or policy changes are accounted for this strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis with a more in-depth review with partners taking place after three years.