



Child Exploitation Strategy 2021 - 2025

“We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear”

Nelson Mandela

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Statement of Intent

The exploitation of children and young people is the responsibility of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board and Countywide Community Safety Partnership. The multi-agency partnerships are expected to work together across safeguarding and community safety ensuring that young people are supported to safely identify ways to exit and withdraw from exploitation. Young people must also be supported to carefully disclose information, so perpetrators are held accountable and brought to justice. The partnership will ensure that safeguarding responses and procedures are put into place to safeguard, protect, and prevent young people from exploitation. Where possible, agencies should ensure that young people are not criminalised and prosecuted, with such action only used as a last resort.

"Children who are exploited and groomed for criminal purposes are equally as deserving of support. The language of 'criminal exploitation' is rarely understood and therefore those affected are not offered the same response. All forms of exploitation should be considered in the same way, with an understanding of grooming and vulnerability. The learning and best practice in place around CSE should be extended to include victims of all forms of exploitation – (Missing People, 2017)

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board Policy Statement

The Exploitation of Children (CE) is completely unacceptable. Children and young people who are exploited are the victims of child abuse, and their needs require careful assessment and intervention. They are likely to need welfare services and in many cases protection under the Children Act 1989.

It is our collective responsibility to identify those children and young people at risk of exploitation and our joint responsibility to protect them and safeguard them from further risk of harm. It is also our joint responsibility to prevent children becoming victims of this form of abuse and reduce the opportunities that offenders may have to exploit children in the future.

We aim to raise the profile of child exploitation to protect and safeguard children from harm. We shall achieve this by developing and maintaining effective local responses and through the delivery of an effective multi-agency strategy and delivery plan delivered by key partners through the Child Exploitation Strategic Group. This includes the implementation of timely and effective risk management and the implementation of a comprehensive range of child centred interventions for children who are at risk or are victims of sexual and/or criminal exploitation.

We recognise that child exploitation can have a serious long-term impact on every aspect of a child or young person's life, health, and education. It can damage the lives of families and carers and can lead to family break ups. Effective interventions delivered by all agencies to assist with these longer-term impacts are also a key area of focus for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. The partnership will also make a joint commitment to a Contextual Safeguarding Model to ensure that risk is managed, and effective interventions are delivered appropriately.

Strategy Principles

Our vision is to reduce child exploitation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to keep children safe, so they can lead healthy lives. We commit to taking new, innovative, and evidenced approaches, focusing on harm reduction in our communities, preventing victimisation and repeat victimisation, ensuring the lived experiences of the child sits at the centre of our approach. Whilst acknowledging the role of traditional approaches such as Criminal Justice, we will prioritise an approach which seeks to improve the long-term safety leading to positive outcomes for our communities. The partnership recognises there may be a risk associated with this approach, however, accepts this is necessary to deliver resilient, thriving communities.

We will deliver a strong core offer against our statutory partnership responsibilities whilst understanding, where funding is available, how we seek to strengthen this offer.

We will achieve this by –

- Working to prevent children becoming victims and offenders of child exploitation and by challenging the attitudes, behaviours and environments which foster it.
- Ensuring we have an agreed assessment mechanism and threshold to identify, manage and mitigate the risk to vulnerable victims across the county.
- Ensure we work in a way that encourages partnership planning around the child through a contextual safeguarding model and have an agreed core offer for those children at all levels of risk.
- Working to pursue those perpetrators who seek to cause harm by exploiting vulnerable children in our communities.
- There will be a designated lead person within each partner organisation with responsibility for implementing the Child Exploitation Strategy where achievable.

Principles Underpinning the Multi-Agency Response to Child Exploitation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

This strategy is based upon the seven principles set out below, as identified in the ‘See Me, Hear Me Framework’¹

1. The child’s best interests must be the top priority

The responses by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board to child exploitation seek to take a child centred approach, whilst at the same time recognising that to protect other children and future abuse there is a need to identify, disrupt and prosecute offenders.

Children do not make informed choices to enter or remain in exploitative situations. They do so through coercion, enticement, manipulation, or desperation. Children under 16 years old cannot consent to sexual activity and sexual activity with a child under 13 years is statutory rape.

¹ *If Only Someone Had Listened: Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups* OCC 2013

Sexually exploited children or those at risk, should be treated as victims of abuse, not offenders. Prosecution should be focused on those who abuse children and young people in this way. It is important to remember that these perpetrators may be adults, or they may be the child's peer or close to their age. The needs of the children within a perpetrator's family must also be considered.

2. Participation of children and young people

'Children want to be respected, their views to be heard, to have stable relationships with professionals built on trust and to have consistent support provided for their individual needs. This should guide the behaviour of professionals. Anyone working with children should see and speak to the child; listen to what they say, take their views seriously; and work with them collaboratively when deciding how to support their needs.'² Agencies should always consider the wishes and feelings of the children and young people receiving their services. This is no more or less true for victims or those at risk of child exploitation.

3. Enduring relationships and support.

Support should be tailored to meet the needs of the individual, considering their age, ethnicity, beliefs, sexual orientation, disability, language, and maturity. As mentioned above, lasting, trusting relationships with professionals who offer consistent support are crucial to support and protect children and young people and aid their recovery.

As with other areas of child protection, the effective safeguarding of children and young people is best achieved through early help and intervention. Professionals working with young people are well placed to identify risks at an early stage and should ensure they have the knowledge and skills to identify and respond to the vulnerabilities and risk indicators of child exploitation. Information concerning training and guidance and information can be found on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board website.

Professionals should be supported in building relationships with the children and young people they are working with. They should also have access to support for themselves through their line manager and/or the lead for child exploitation within their agency.

4. Comprehensive problem-profiling

It is important for all Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to establish the prevalence and character of exploitation in their areas. The most effective and accurate profile includes data from a range of agencies, compiled with the oversight of the Missing and Child Exploitation meeting (MACE) and shared across key partners to inform activity concerning child exploitation.

Profiles should contain the following:

a) The incidence of child exploitation:

This should include data held by Children's Social Care, Police, health agencies and the voluntary sector (where available) and should be considered for consistency and accuracy. Collection of data may be best facilitated via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub.

² *Working Together to Safeguard Children* Department for Education 2018 (Updated 2020)

b) Information on local trends:

The CPSCP have sought this data from Cambridgeshire Constabulary to strengthen their approach to child exploitation. Information collated by the Police has identified 'hotspots and those young people considered to be most at risk through their use of the Vulnerability Assessment Tracker (VAT).

c) Prevalence of core risks:

5. This information indicates the probable extent and character of exploitation in the area. This can then be used to determine what type of preventative services are likely to be most effective in reducing the risk of child exploitation.
6. There is in place an effective information-sharing protocol predicated on the best interests and safeguarding of children and young people. All relevant agencies and services should be signatories and it should clearly state what information should be shared, by whom and the process for doing this. It can be found here: [Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Multi-Agency Information Sharing](#)

For more information, professionals should refer to the Department for Education Guidance: 'Information sharing: Advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services to children, young people, parents and carers' 2015.

7. Supervision, support, and training for staff

Agencies within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough should invest in the development and support of staff including the provision of regular supervision and the opportunities for staff to reflect on practice. Those professionals who offer direct support to exploited children and young people might require further intensive training and must have regular opportunities to reflect on their practice with a skilled line manager or supervisor.

8. Evaluation and review

Regular evaluations and reviews of this strategy and the Child Exploitation Delivery Plan must be undertaken to ensure services are progressing activity to reduce the risks posed to young people by child exploitation, and interventions are achieving their intended outcomes. Children and young people from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough areas should be involved in this process to ensure improvement. Questions against which the strategic response should be evaluated are detailed in the 'See Me, Hear Me Framework'³ under the following headings:

- Voice of the child
- Voice of the professional
- Protecting the child.

³ 'See Me, Hear Me Framework, from *If Only Someone Had Listened: Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs and groups* OCC 2013

Strategy Aims and Objectives

Prevention, Awareness Raising and Training

Preventing young people from becoming involved in exploitation is crucial if the cycle of county lines and gang-related violence is to be broken. The Strategic Group will be responsible for ensuring training is provided across the partnership to enable practitioners to be skilled in identifying exploitation, and knowledgeable about how to respond appropriately to safeguard children and young people.

A programme of training is to be delivered across all schools in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to allow the education workforce to be fully integrated with work across the areas in respect of tackling and responding to child exploitation. This training should include specific training with staff within Pupil Referral Units, the County Schools and Residential Units because of the vulnerabilities relating to these cohorts of young people.

Training should be delivered to all staff across services working with children and young people. The partnership should ensure that this is delivered in an effective way through identifying training that can be cascaded, as well as appropriate online training modules. The Strategic Group will be responsible for approaching relevant Safeguarding and Community Safety Boards to identify funding to support the rollout of appropriate training for the workforce.

Training for the workforce should include:

- Recognising the signs of child exploitation in children and young people
- Awareness of vulnerable locations across the area
- Association between Child Criminal Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation
- How to share intelligence relating to child exploitation concerns
- Procedures relating to safeguarding and protecting children and young people from child exploitation
- Knowledge of thresholds and processes for accessing available support and interventions for those at risk of child exploitation
- Preventative child exploitation interventions for those within Early Help Services
- Intensive safeguarding child exploitation interventions for those within Youth Offending and Social Care Services.

The partnership will also be responsible for raising awareness regarding child exploitation amongst children and young people themselves, so we can prevent young people from becoming exploited at the earliest point. Preventative programmes should be delivered in schools, and where possible to parents and professionals. The Strategic Group will be responsible for approaching relevant Safeguarding and Community Safety Boards to identify funding to support the delivery of awareness raising programmes for children and young people.

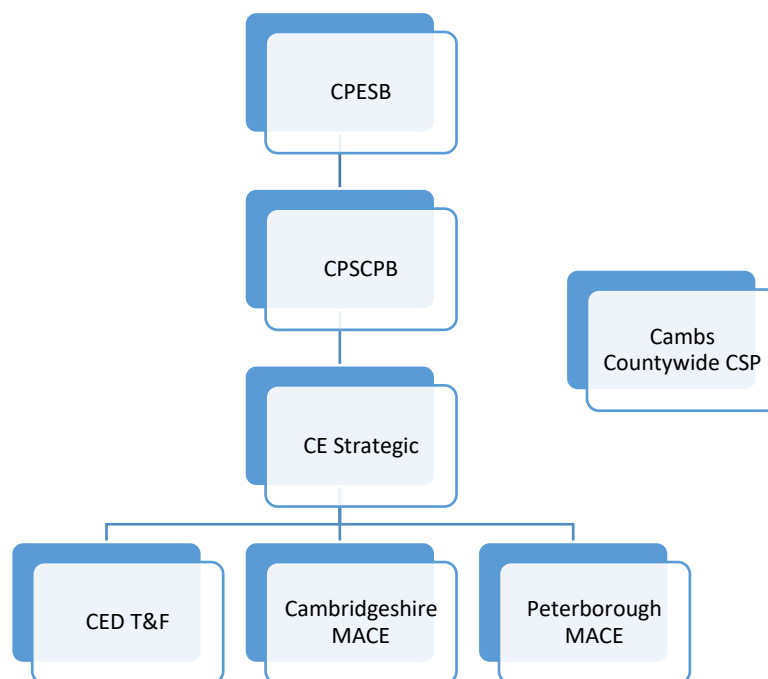
The training and awareness programme for child exploitation will be supported by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board.

Governance and Delivery Plan

This strategy has been agreed by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. The strategy sets out the priorities and agrees an approach that enhances a county-wide approach to the issue of sexual and criminal exploitation. The rationale being that this will create an environment where sexual and criminal exploitation is effectively prevented, identified and challenged. The Partnership Board have a Child Exploitation Strategic Group where sexual and criminal exploitation work is prioritised and coordinated through the Child Exploitation Delivery Plan. The plan will be refreshed every three months and will be reviewed at the Strategic Group.

A Strategic Child Exploitation Group will include the Police, Children's Social Care, Youth Offending Service, Targeted Youth Support Service, Early Help, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust, Community Safety Partnership representative and the National Probation Service. The partnership is responsible for ensuring that appropriate processes are in place to disrupt and detect those responsible for criminal exploitation and ensure that modern day slavery and trafficking legislation is applied. In addition, the group must also be confident that procedures are in place to identify children and young people at risk and safeguard them from potential harm.

Structure of Governance



The key objectives of the Child Exploitation Strategic Group and Multi-agency Delivery Plan will be:

- Prevent young people becoming at risk and raise awareness of child exploitation
- Identify and safeguard victims of child exploitation
- Identify and monitor vulnerable locations across the area
- Empower those affected by child exploitation by supporting them to identify strategies to exit and withdraw safely

- Disrupt perpetrators and bring them to justice using modern day slavery and trafficking legislation
- Maximise operational solutions with local, regional, and national partners to disrupt county lines, reduce associated criminal exploitation, youth violence and increase youth safety.

What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

In March 2015, the Government indicated the intention for the first time to provide a definition of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)⁴ and in February 2017 published advice including definition⁵ emphasising that CSE is a complex form of abuse which can be difficult to identify and assess:

“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.”

What is Child Criminal Exploitation?

Child Criminal Exploitation is common in county lines and occurs where an individual, or group, takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person **under the age of 18**. 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.

County Lines

County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons; and the response to tackle it involves the Police, the National Crime Agency, a wide range of Government departments, local government agencies and VCS (Voluntary and Community Sector) organisations. County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing, and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults and local communities.

Individuals or gangs use vulnerable children and adults to transport and sell Class A drugs, primarily from urban areas into market or coastal towns or rural areas, to establish new drug markets or take over existing ones. They often use children to transport and hide weapons and to secure dwellings of vulnerable people in the area, so that they can use them as a base from which to sell drugs.

⁴ Para 48. Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation. HM Government. March 2015

⁵ Advice, Child sexual exploitation: Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation. Department for Education. February 2017

County lines may involve the commission of the offences of 'slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour' and 'human trafficking' as defined by the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Vulnerable people's travel may be 'arranged and facilitated by a person, with the view to them being exploited', which amounts to human trafficking according to section 2 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Vulnerable people may then be forced to work for the drug dealer, often held in the vulnerable adult's home against their will and under the force of threat if they do not do as they are told. This meets the definition of 'slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour' in section 1 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

County lines is the Police term for urban gangs supplying drugs to suburban areas and market and coastal towns using dedicated mobile phone lines or "deal lines." It involves child criminal exploitation, as gangs use children and vulnerable people to move drugs and money. Gangs establish a base in the market location, typically by taking over the homes of local vulnerable adults by force or coercion in a practice referred to as 'cuckooing.'

Some vulnerable persons are forced to carry the drugs in harmful ways that are abusive and could result in their death. For example, 'plugging' is commonly used, which is when children or vulnerable adults can be forced by an adult, or another child or vulnerable adult, to insert and carry drugs in their rectum or vagina.

'County Lines is a national issue involving the use of mobile phone and train 'lines' by groups to extend their drug dealing business into new locations outside of their home areas. This issue affects the majority of forces. A 'county lines' enterprise almost always involves exploitation of vulnerable persons; this can involve both children and adults who require safeguarding' – (National Crime Agency, 2015)

The national picture on county lines continues to develop but there are recorded cases of:

- children as young as 12 years old being exploited or moved by gangs to courier drugs out of their local area; 15-16 years is the most common age range
- both males and females being exploited
- White British children being targeted because gangs perceive they are more likely to evade Police detection, but a person of any ethnicity or nationality may be exploited
- the use of social media to make initial contact with children and young people
- class A drug users being targeted so that gangs can take over their homes ('cuckooing').

While living in a vulnerable adult's home, far away from their own home, vulnerable people may be required to set up or be part of a new drug market or expand an existing one. This involves vulnerable people putting themselves in extremely dangerous situations with vulnerable adults who are strangers who want to buy Class A drugs from them. Other dealers in the area may also target these vulnerable people to prevent them taking over their 'patch'. Some people have been stabbed and killed by rival gangs or dealers. Often, the first time that the Police become aware of county lines activity in their area is because of a significant increase in knife crime and youth violence.

It needs to be understood and acknowledged by all professionals that young people are subjected to significant pressure and coerced into criminal activity and, as such, feel they have

no choice other than to follow the instructions of those who are exploiting and therefore subjecting them to abuse.

Missing Children and Young People

This section should be read in conjunction with the CPSCP Protocol on Missing Children and Young People: [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Children Missing from Home or Care Protocol](#)

There are clear links between children and young people who go missing from home or care settings and child exploitation. Missing episodes are a high-risk indicator of child exploitation.

Assessing situations, such as missing children, goes beyond the simplicity of the actual event and needs a much more sophisticated approach. Agencies need to be mindful of the fact that the focus on the number of occasions where a child goes missing, is not as important as why they go missing and the increased risks they face when they do. Any kind of assessment must take this view and must look at any factors which may 'push' or 'pull' a child or young person into sexual exploitation. 'Push' factors are exactly what you would expect - they are things that push a child away from home. They include not feeling accepted in the environment where children should be safe and happy. Family breakdown and arguments can generate 'pushing away', as can abuse, drug and alcohol misuse by family members, and new step-families moving in.

Agency and Professional Responsibilities:

Responsibility of all agencies

No one agency can address the complex elements of child exploitation on its own, largely because a child's and family's needs cannot always be met by a single agency. Effective interventions, whether early help, child in need or child protection, depend on professionals developing working relationships which are sympathetic to each other's legal responsibilities, agency's purpose and procedures, respective roles and agencies capacities.

All agencies represented on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board have a responsibility to contribute to the safeguarding of children in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire.

Responsibility of Health

Health is a universal service that is accessed by individuals from all the communities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Health professionals are involved with children and families throughout their lives and consequently they get to know families in more detail than other statutory agencies. Health professionals, particularly sexual health workers, school nurses and specialist paediatric staff, spend time with young people either in people's homes or other establishments (schools/hospitals/clinics) and are very well-placed to identify cases of child exploitation. It is important that health professionals are alert to the signs of sexual exploitation in young people and attend the numerous safeguarding training opportunities that are available to them. The nature and impact of child sexual exploitation is cumulative and corrosive, so it is essential that all health professionals maintain accurate, detailed and contemporaneous records that help to form a "picture" of the exploitation. When a practitioner identifies concerns regarding exploitation in a young person's life, they should speak to a member of the Health Safeguarding Children team to determine what the next steps to take are.

Responsibility of Children's Services

Children's Services are responsible for co-ordinating statutory assessments of children's needs which include the parent's capacity to meet those needs. The assessment may result in the provision of services designed to address the identified needs of the child through a child in need plan. Where a child is assessed as having suffered, or being at risk of, significant harm as a result of Exploitation Children's services will follow a Contextual Safeguarding process to ensure that extra familial risks are considered on a multi-agency basis. This may result in the child becoming subject of a Contextual Safeguarding Conference. Children's Social Care has the statutory responsibility for Contextual Safeguarding, but it will work with other agencies to develop, implement, and monitor a plan (Child in Need or Contextual Safeguarding) to help the child and their family to manage extra familial risks. At times young people may not wish to engage with Children's Social Care, however a Contextual Safeguarding model and approach can still be accessed with an alternative lead professional who will be supported.

Responsibility of Police

The Police have a duty of care to protect all members of the community and to bring offenders to justice. The welfare of children is a priority for the service, and all officers are responsible for identifying and referring children who are at risk or in need. Any Officer can utilise emergency powers to ensure immediate protection of children believed to be at immediate risk of suffering significant harm (this is a very draconian step and should only be utilised in exceptional cases). The Police regularly enter people's homes or target known crime hotspots and are therefore well placed to identify issues that might indicate child exploitation. In these circumstances the Police should liaise with Children's Social Care or the Early Help Team. It is imperative that

Police Officers attend safeguarding training so that they are aware of the signs of abuse and exploitation and know the pathway to follow if they have concerns.

Responsibility of Education

All schools play a significant role in the prevention and identification of all forms of abuse. Schools are a universal service that often provide a safe environment for children and young people. Due to the amount of time that school staff spend with children (and their families) they often know the child and their circumstances better than other agencies.

Schools and settings therefore play a crucial role in identifying behaviours that may be indicative of child exploitation. Concern that a child or young person may be involved in sexual or criminal exploitation, or is at risk of being drawn into it, should always initiate action to ensure the child's safety and welfare.

All education settings should have a policy which sets out how they will address child exploitation. This may be part of the full safeguarding policy or a standalone document. The training for Designated Safeguarding Leads includes additional information and guidance on child exploitation including the use of the Risk Assessment and Management Tool. The Safeguarding Governor should also be aware of their responsibilities for child exploitation.

All adults in schools and settings should be always vigilant and aware of the possible indicators of child exploitation to be able to identify those at risk of being exploited.

There should be provision within the curriculum in all schools and settings for children and young people, from an early age, to understand the meaning of healthy, positive relationships and learn about how to keep themselves and others safe.

Responsibility of Housing

Housing providers and services may have essential information about families or locations identifying cases of exploitation or contributing information to assessments. Staff have an important part to play in reporting concerns where they believe that a child may need support through early help, or in need of statutory intervention.

It is important that housing professionals attend safeguarding training so that they are aware of the signs of abuse and exploitation and know the pathway to follow if they have concerns.

Responsibility of Probation Services

In discharging its statutory responsibilities, the National Probation Service (NPS), through its work with offenders and their families, may become aware of children who are at risk of child exploitation. All Probation staff have a responsibility to be aware of the signs of potential child exploitation and to refer appropriate cases to Early Help or Children's Social Care.

In line with its statutory responsibilities, NPS staff will provide advice to the courts regarding the sentencing of offenders convicted on child exploitation related offences and work closely with prison staff to address their offending behaviour during their sentence. NPS will also work closely with community partner agencies (such as Police and Social Care) when supervising offenders on licence after their release from prison to protect the public and reduce the potential for further harm.

NPS staff will work in collaboration with other agencies at strategic and operational level in developing effective partnership work in dealing with child exploitation. This will include contributing to assessments on individual cases and following all relevant child protection policies, procedures, and protocols.

Responsibility of Youth Offending Service

The Youth Offending Service aims to prevent offending and re-offending of children aged 10-17. All YOS staff have a responsibility to be alert to safeguarding issues in their work with children and their families and must ensure that all young people are assessed to identify risk of Exploitation. Exploitation Risk Assessment Management Tools should be completed where appropriate and appropriate concerns should be raised with line managers and where appropriate referred to Children's Social Care and specialist exploitation teams.

Responsibility of the Voluntary and Community Sector

The VCS often undertake a range of programmes with young people experiencing complex issues, including those affected by exploitation. The VCS are therefore well-placed to identify early concerns that relate to exploitation.

Responsibility to share information

Information sharing is essential to enable early intervention and preventative work, for safeguarding and promoting welfare and for wider public protection.

It is important that practitioners can share information appropriately as part of their day-to-day practice and do so confidently.

It is important to remember there can be significant consequences to not sharing information as there can be to sharing information. You must use your professional judgement to decide whether to share or not, and what information is appropriate to share.

Data protection law reinforces common sense rules of information handling. It is there to ensure personal information is managed in a sensible way.

It helps agencies and organisations to strike a balance between the many benefits of public organisations sharing information and maintaining and strengthening safeguards and privacy of the individual.

It also helps agencies and organisations to balance the need to preserve a trusted relationship between practitioner and child and their family with the need to share information to benefit and improve the life chances of the child.

Performance and Quality Assurance Framework

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Children Partnership Board are responsible for scrutinising multi-agency performance data. To assess the impact of this strategy the Strategic Child Exploitation Group will regularly monitor the following multi-agency quality assurance information:

- What children, young people and their families tell us
- Thematic case audits (both single and multi-agency)
- In addition, the following outcome indicators will be used to provide the Strategic Child Exploitation Group with insight into the effectiveness of the strategy
- Contacts received by the MASH specifically associated with child exploitation, including age, gender, ethnicity and referring agency.
- Data concerning children who go missing from home and care, including age, gender, frequency of episodes and length of episodes.

- Significant risk child exploitation or missing cases presented at the Cambridgeshire or Peterborough MACE.

Appendix 1

Risk Management Tool

[Risk Management Tool \(November 2019\)](#)