

North Yorkshire Council
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

19th March 2025

Exploitation Report

Report of the Corporate Director Stuart Carlton

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The focus of the report is on the current landscape of Child exploitation in North Yorkshire, both criminal and sexual exploitation and the response of the Children and families service, North Yorkshire police and partner agencies.

2.0 Summary

2.1 **Pages 1 & 2:** Definitions of child exploitation.

Pages 2 & 3: North Yorkshire vision for children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation and the key priorities for the Multi Agency Child Exploitation strategy.

Pages 3 & 4: an overview of the current data for children and young people who are assessed to be at risk of exploitation. An overview of the current landscape of Organised Crime groups and more detail in respect of criminal and sexual exploitation in North Yorkshire. Information from NY Police about their mapping and scoring of Organised Crime groups and county lines.

Pages 5 & 6: How we are responding to these challenges, National referral mechanism (NRM) and multi-agency partnership working.

Pages 6 & 7: What are we doing as a service and multi-agency partnership to support children, young people, their families, carers, and practitioners.

Pages 7 & 8: Going forward and links to our North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership website, our child exploitation strategy and Be aware Hub.

3.0 Background

3.1 Child Exploitation is a form of child abuse that involves the manipulation and/or coercion of young people under the age of 18.

Exploitation is when someone, or a group of people tricks or misleads a young person into doing things for them that are not right; either criminally or sexually.

There are lots of different types of child exploitation and more than one type of exploitation can be happening to a child or young person at any one time.

Sexual Exploitation: Being encouraged, tricked, or forced to take part in a sexual activity (like having sex with someone, performing a sexual act, or sending/receiving indecent images) in exchange for something. It can happen face to face or online, with individuals or in groups.

Criminal Exploitation: Being encouraged, tricked, or forced to take part in criminal activities (like stealing, selling, or holding drugs) An example of this is “County lines”; This is where children and young people are exploited to transport drugs from one place to another (it can be from large cities to smaller rural areas, but it could be from one street to another).

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’.

The gangs are likely to exploit children, young people, and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

County lines are run by highly organised criminal networks that use sophisticated, frequently evolving techniques to groom young people and evade capture by the police.

Financial exploitation: involves criminals approaching children and young people online through gaming and social media platforms, and in places like shops and cashpoints with offers of quick cash and fake job opportunities, only to use and control their bank accounts to commit fraud and launder money from organised crime. This can also include criminals asking to use a young person’s home address for fraudulent deliveries.

Online Exploitation: This is like any form of exploitation that can happen with people face to face, but this is happening in the online world, through things like chat, social media spaces, and online gaming.

Trafficking and Modern Slavery: Being tricked, forced, or persuaded to leave where you live and then moved or transported from one area to another to work or perform sexual or criminal acts. It can include people being moved from one county to another; but can also include the movement from one town to another.

In North Yorkshire we have a robust Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) and Contextual Safeguarding Strategy which sets out the partnership vision for disrupting and tackling child exploitation in North Yorkshire.

Our vision is that:

“All children in North Yorkshire who are being exploited and are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse are effectively identified and protected by services which are delivered in a coordinated and informed way that consistently responds to the harm and risks and improves the outcomes for our children, their families and the wider community”.

The Strategy has identified four key priorities across the partnership. These four priorities will be underpinned by a detailed action plan that holds partners to account for their plans to fulfil the actions set out across our priority areas.

Prepare: Prepare the partnership and wider community in understanding the scope and complexity of child exploitation and risk outside the home.

Prevent: Commit to a whole partnership and wider community approach to prevention, contextual safeguarding and keeping children safe from exploitation.

Protect: To protect and support children at risk of or experiencing exploitation that does not label or blame them for the abuse they are experiencing.

Pursue: Actively pursue, disrupt, and respond to perpetrators of exploitation, and work collectively as a partnership to disrupt the exploitation of children in the contextual spaces they are spending their time.

Current data of children and young people who are assessed to be at risk of Exploitation in North Yorkshire:

We use the following risk descriptors when assessing the risk of child exploitation and this is completed using a child exploitation risk assessment, which included police information and intelligence, information from other agencies working with the child or young person such as education, health, youth justice and third sector and the young person and their parents or carers. These assessments are robustly reviewed in our multi agency screening team by a manager with the young person's social worker in attendance, the specialist social worker, a police officer from the child exploitation team, and other agencies such as health and youth justice service, if they are working with the young person. There are four outcomes of the assessments; no additional risk: low risk, medium or high risk and depending on the outcome will determine the frequency of the review period. For example, if a young person is assessed to be at high risk of exploitation, then their assessment is reviewed every four weeks, whereas medium risk is every six to eight weeks and low risk is every twelve weeks, unless information is received which would warrant an earlier review.

We have seen an increase in the past 24 months of young people who are assessed to be at risk of child exploitation and one hypothesis for this is greater identification of cases and a recognition of the increase in referrals to the children and families service across the board of all vulnerabilities.

There is an increased awareness in society, an increase in knowledge of partner agencies, increased information sharing and intelligence of child exploitation and contextual safeguarding. All partners can now submit intelligence to North Yorkshire Police online via the North Yorkshire safeguarding partnership website. These forms will be directed to the Force Control Room (FCR) and dealt with just like a 101 call. In the case of partner intelligence, this will route directly to the Intelligence Unit from the safeguarding partnership website. The increase in intelligence is supporting North Yorkshire police with their disruption plans.

We are seeing a changing picture in county lines and how Organised Crime Groups (OCG's) are operating, this is a changing landscape which is fast paced. The operating model of some of the OCG's in the area and their business models are changing and we are having to change the way we respond to this.

There is an emerging national crime trend of young people carrying weapons, which is linked to the coercion and intimidation that they are facing. Children and families service and partner agencies are working closely with police teams to try and understand more about why young people need this level of protection and we are aware that one of the changes is OCG's are trying to control people at a younger age.

We are seeing more males than females who are criminally exploited and more females are sexually exploited, however this is not exclusive and there is a cross over for both genders.

The landscape of child sexual exploitation is changing, since 2013 when there was the independent review into child sexual exploitation in Rochdale, which examined the council's response to issues around child sexual exploitation. This led to a new version of Working Together to safeguard children 2013, informed by the Munro review (DfE 2013).

We are seeing more exploitation taking place online, particularly in social media chat spaces, which can then result in young people being groomed to meet their abuser in person, often a significant distance away from their home.

North Yorkshire Police have 22 mapped and scored Organised Crime Groups of which 7 are County Lines modelled OCG's. The County remains an importing force, impacted mainly from West Yorkshire however we do have a line from Derbyshire.

The breakdown of the 7 County Lines is.

- Scarborough & Ryedale – 2
These have both had intensive investigations. One County Line has significant disruption, affecting the ability to operate as the principal nominal been charged with conspiracy. The principal nominal of the other OCG is now in prison which is a great success story. The operational capability of this county line has also significantly reduced.
Both county Lines are now moving towards being archived as the risk has massively reduced.
- Selby – 1 which is moving towards the archiving phase due to the amount of disruption which has affected its ability to operate.
- Harrogate & Craven – 2
The principal nominal for one of these OCGs is now on remand so the risk for this OCG is decreasing, the other OCG has recently been mapped and scored and is in the intelligence development phase.

This is a really positive picture with significant focus having been put in place on developing Local Responsible Officers and our neighbourhood policing teams. On the 19th of March we have our next round of 6th monthly training which is now open to partners. This enables us to build relationships and work effectively in the multi-agency space.

How we are responding to these challenges

One of the robust ways that we respond to cross border exploitation of children and young people and organised crime gangs is with our MACE Level 2 Arrangements.

The purpose of the Level 2 meeting is to facilitate the sharing of information and identify action regarding: the places and spaces where children and young people may be at risk of exploitation and locations that could pose a risk of exploitation to children and young people.

The review of community intelligence and emerging themes, trends, and links in local areas.

The identification of potential perpetrators and the coordination of partner intervention and disruption.

This may also include information sharing with partners in neighbouring police force and local authority areas to identify where children may be at risk of being trafficked within and out of our towns and villages and/or subject to exploitation through county lines.

The emphasis of the meeting is around facilitating early identification and setting of actions to prevent, intervene and robustly tackle early signs of exploitation.

Due to the nature of the MACE and Contextual Safeguarding Level 2 meetings, sensitive information may be shared and relevant details of specific children who have been identified as at risk of exploitation through the MACE Level 1 meeting will be shared along with details of their allocated social worker or early help worker.

Cross border information sharing is also being strengthened with the introduction of a regionals meeting between the Multi Agency Child Exploitation chairs of level 2 meetings led by the Exploitation Officer from the North Yorkshire safeguarding partnership. These meetings are to ensure that any cross-border information is shared, and for discussions about emerging themes, trends and patterns that partners are seeing and how they are being responded to, which is an important part of disruption planning.

North Yorkshire Council are part of the pilot for the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) which is the national framework for identifying and referring victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive the appropriate support. The Single Competent Authority (SCA) administers it, which is part of the Home Office. The SCA recognise North Yorkshire as one of the leading local authorities in the NRM pilot.

In the past two years we have seen an increase in the quality of referrals to the NRM panel, which means that the decision making will be ratified in a timelier manner by the SCA, this avoiding delay for the young person.

There has been an increase in investigation of Modern Slavery Human Trafficking Investigations and joined up working between Children Services and North Yorkshire Police, specifically joint visits.

Cases heard at Court in a timely way, less delay for child and Children are officially recognised as victims of modern slavery which changes professionals' perception of the behaviour and provides validation for the child or young person that they are "seen" as victims of crime.

What are we doing as a service and multi-agency partnership to support children, young people, their families, carers, and practitioners:

Children and Young people's service have a team of three Specialist Social Workers and the core focus of the Specialist Social Work role is to drive the quality of practice and robust arrangements for managing complex cases related to exploitation. This includes working closely with partners and supporting social workers and children and families' workers to deliver innovative interventions to children and young people across the County. Specialist Social Workers (SSWs) are consultants in the areas of child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, and contextual safeguarding.

All children, young people and their families / carers who are risk of exploitation will have a lead practitioner allocated, this will be either a Social Worker or Child and Family worker from our Early Help service. As part of the plan of intervention and support, referrals can be made to organisations that we have a service level agreement with such as St Giles Trust, who will provide a mentor to do direct work with the child or young person and they may have lived experience of being exploited themselves. For parents and carers, we can refer to the Ivison trust, who provide parents and carers support, advice, guidance, and training. Both services are pivotal in disruption planning for children and young people.

North Yorkshire Police have a specialist Exploitation team of specially trained dedicated Officers who work very closely with the Children and families service and will often complete joint visits to families and lead on disruption planning and provide a significant contribution to a child or young person's safety plan. Support can be provided from our Youth Justice Service, education and health professionals and North Yorkshire's trusted relationship mentor service for children and young people who have been exploited.

The North Yorkshire Safeguarding children partnership provide an extensive range of information, resources, training materials, online webinars and in person training to all partners working with children, young people and their families affected by child exploitation. This is valuable to support all practitioners involved in this complex work to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded, and that disruption of exploitation is taking place.

"Be aware" is an online knowledge hub set up and run by NYSCP in collaboration with young people, parents and carers, and professionals across North Yorkshire to help prevent and tackle child exploitation.

March 18th is National Exploitation Awareness Day and to support this work, NWG are delivering a webinar to raise an awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). This session is designed to empower individuals with the knowledge and tools needed to recognise and respond to signs of CSE, ultimately helping to make communities safer.

Going forward

The focus will continue to be on ensuring that we deliver our vision to the children and young people of North Yorkshire and achieve the four key priorities in the strategic plan.

Be Aware is a knowledge hub on the safeguarding partnership website, designed to help prevent and tackle child exploitation in North Yorkshire. It has been used by professionals across North Yorkshire as a key source of knowledge and information about child exploitation since March 2021. The site has now expanded to include vital information designed for young people, parents, carers, and local communities so we can all help to tackle child exploitation in North Yorkshire together. The site has been developed in consultation with young people and families across North Yorkshire, ensuring the information is shaped in ways that will have the biggest impact. Stories and experiences of child exploitation have also been shared, so families and residents can see what child exploitation can look and feel like, and the impact it can have on victims. One young person who shared their experiences of child exploitation said "if I tell my story and how everything happened with me, I think they'd be able to listen and, like, understand more about and stupid it is". His mum, who also shared her story said, "if it helps at least one person, then it's done something hasn't it?"

The site is designed with information designed specifically for parents, carers, young people, residents and businesses to raise awareness and provide a one-stop shop of information about child exploitation.

It is of interest to note that on the 18 March 2025, the National Child Exploitation Awareness Day will take place. This day aims to highlight the issues surrounding Child Exploitation; encouraging everyone to think, spot and speak out against abuse and adopt a zero-tolerance to adults developing inappropriate relationships with children or children exploiting and abusing their peers. This month North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership are proud to support the National Working Group in highlighting this awareness day.

On the 18th of June we are hosting our first conference on Child Exploitation and serious youth violence in Harrogate, we hope that up to 200 delegates will attend and this will be a key opportunity to upskill practitioners in the complexity of child exploitation and risk outside the home.

For further information, please see links below to our North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children Partnership website, our child exploitation strategy and Be aware Hub.

<https://safeguardingchildren.co.uk/>

<https://safeguardingchildren.co.uk/Resources/multi-agency-child-exploitation-mace-and-contextual-safeguarding-strategy-2024-27/>

<https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/beaware/>

4.0 Contribution to Council Priorities

4.1 In North Yorkshire we have a robust Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) and Contextual Safeguarding Strategy which sets out the partnership vision for disrupting and tackling child exploitation in North Yorkshire. Our vision is that:

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5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 No financial implications.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 Not relevant

7.0 Equalities Implications

7.1 Not relevant

8.0 Climate Change Implications

8.1 Not relevant

9.1 Performance Implications

Not relevant

10.0 Policy Implications

Not relevant

11.0 Recommendation

11.0 Recommendation

For Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to:

- i) Note the points raised in this report

Stuart Carlton
Corporate Director of Children and Young People's Service
County Hall
Northallerton
5th March 2025

Report Author:
Adele Herdsman
Group Manager Multi Agency Screening Team and Multiple Vulnerabilities.

Presenters of Report:
Adele Herdsman
Group Manager Multi Agency Screening Team and Multiple Vulnerabilities.

DCI Carol Kirk
Detective Chief Inspector, Safeguarding North Yorkshire Police.

Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.