



**CHILDREN AND FAMILY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**5 NOVEMBER 2024**

**LEICESTERSHIRE'S RESPONSE TO TACKLING CHILD CRIMINAL**  
**EXPLOITATION**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES**

**Purpose of the report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the work and progress of the Child Exploitation, Missing and Modern Slavery Hub. The Committee received the last report on 7 November 2023.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remains a strategic priority for Leicestershire County Council, and the County Council remains an active member of the Child Exploitation Regional Leads group. In April 2024, Leicestershire County Council's Child Exploitation Framework 2024-26 was updated. This can be found within Appendix A. the Framework continues to underpin the Council's commitment and response to young people who are victims of any form of Child Criminal Exploitation.

**Background**

3. Leicestershire County Council's Child Exploitation (CE) Service are located at South Wigston Police Station, which also houses the Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit, Child Exploitation Team and Missing Team. The Vulnerability Hub, as it is called, enables the succinct response to child exploitation by all agencies, creating a multi-agency response in line with the government's recommendations "to combat the national threat of all forms of CCE and respond to the local prominence of incidents of CCE and Missing children and young people."
4. The multi-agency approach within the Hub continues to benefit children within Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (LLR) at risk of exploitation on a daily basis. The Terms of Reference for the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) partnership has been updated and provides a guide detailing the operating procedures for all multi-agency meetings held within the Hub. This can be found within Appendix B.
5. A Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) attended by representatives from the three Local Authorities (Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and Rutland Council) the Police and Health colleagues is held at the Hub where all

incidents of suspected exploitation or children going missing in the prior 24 hours are reviewed. If assessed as being high risk, the Hub assigns the child to a police detective and a social worker.

6. To review the multi-agency and safeguarding response to high risk exploited children a fortnightly Operational Review Meeting (FORM) is held. The same agencies involved in the DRMM's attend these meetings to provide updates on the safeguarding intervention that is taking place for children identified as being at high risk of exploitation. It also provides multi-agency oversight and agreement if a child is downgraded to medium or low risk.

### **Activity and Updates**

7. In January 2024, the Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Operations Group amalgamated with the Serious Youth Violence (SYV) Group. The new group is now called Preventing Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Delivery group. In February 2024, Damian Elcock, Director of Children's Social Care and Community Safety at Leicester City Council, took over chair of this group for the next 12 months. The new group is a sub-group of the Adolescent Safety and Diversion Board, and the new group is tasked with leading the following priority: '*Embedding our improved joint response to young people at risk or involved with Exploitation Youth Violence, including a focus of young people who go missing*'. On an operational level the MACE reports into the Preventing Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Delivery Group, providing assurance of multi-agency operational oversight and response to children at risk of exploitation.
8. In March 2024, in preparation for a potential Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) for Serious Youth Violence, the Multi-Agency Inspection Group (MAIG) led by Leicestershire County Council, commissioned an audit focused on the theme of children being exploited and affected by serious youth violence. The findings of the audit identified the link between school exclusion from mainstream education and children being at risk of exploitation. In addition to this, gaps in services supporting vulnerable young people when they turn 18 years old, and nearly half of the children audited having a neurodiverse diagnosis e.g. Autism, ADHD, ADD, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia and Dyspraxia. The MACE has been tasked with undertaking work to address the recommendations from this audit.
9. On 18 March 2024 for CE Awareness Day, the Child Exploitation team delivered internal training to staff within Leicestershire County Council. The theme was the voice of the child, with learners having the opportunity to listen and engage with young people who have lived experience of child exploitation. The team were supported to deliver the training with Police and Health colleagues. Positive feedback was received from attendees, who were revered by the young people and their ability to share their experiences in front of an audience.
10. In April 2024, Ofsted inspectors arrived in Leicestershire to complete an inspection of children's services. One of the inspectors visited the Vulnerability Hub and the Service had the privilege of showcasing its multi-agency approach to combating child exploitation. The feedback that the Child Exploitation service received was positive and validated the work being achieved within the Vulnerability Hub. This feedback is set out below.

*“Children at risk of extra-familial harm benefit from specialist support, interventions and timely assessment from highly skilled multidisciplinary workers in the vulnerability hub. Daily multi-agency meetings take place to enable professionals to review intelligence and risks effectively. The impact of these processes is helping professionals to be informed, to map activity and networks, and to undertake disruption work to reduce the risk of harm.*

*Children who frequently go missing from home and are at risk of exploitation in the community receive determined and impactful support from specialist workers in the vulnerability hub. Workers are tenacious in trying to engage children who have been missing, making good use of return home interviews. Information from return home interviews is used effectively to inform individual risk assessments and helps professionals to identify wider risks to children.*

*Inspection of Leicestershire local authority children’s services 22 April to 3 May 2024.”*

11. Over the last year, the Child Exploitation team have developed links with both the Council’s and Barnardo’s children’s homes. The links are in place to strengthen the Barnardo’s staffs’ knowledge of child exploitation so that they are able to identify risks sooner when a young person has had a missing episode. Work being undertaken with the homes is focused on providing a swift response to young people where child exploitation has been identified.

### **Performance and Activity**

12. A range of data is collected on behalf of the multi-agency CE team on a quarterly basis and analysed by Leicestershire County Council’s Business Intelligence Service. The data includes:
  - i. Child Sexual Exploitation referrals and outcomes
  - ii. Child Criminal Exploitation referrals and outcomes
  - iii. Missing children
13. Child Sexual Exploitation data for Leicestershire in Quarter 1 recorded 21 referrals. The Child Exploitation Screening tool was completed for all 21 referrals. The data from this screening tool indicates that online exploitation remains the biggest concern within CSE, with the largest number of young people falling within the 16-17 years age group. This is a change from previous years where the largest cohort of young people have been within the 14-15 year age bracket. On reviewing this change of data, the Service was able to evidence an increase in referrals for young people in the 16-17 age group that have presented as homeless. In November 2023, the Families Together team began working with young people who were vulnerable to becoming homeless due to family breakdowns. Assessments undertaken with the young people identified a number of vulnerabilities that were exacerbated by them becoming homeless, with risk of child sexual exploitation being a factor. The correlation of an increase in referrals for this age group and the development of a new team would indicate that young people experiencing homeless were missing out on the right services. In respect of gender, 85% of referrals were for females.

14. Child Criminal Exploitation data for Leicestershire in Quarter 1 recorded 53 referrals. The most common age group for this cohort of children is aged 14-15 years and this age group has been consistent for the last four years. The data collated using the Child Exploitation Screening tool, reports that 39 children referred are living at home. In terms of area of residence Charnwood has generated the most referrals with 17 children and Hinckley & Bosworth having the next highest referrals with eight children. In respect of gender, 81% of referrals were for males.
15. Missing data for non-looked after children (non-LAC), shows a slight increase since the last quarter with Quarter 1 recording 80 children going missing from home with 125 missing episodes recorded in total.
16. Missing data for looked after children (LAC) during Quarter 1 was 54 children, showing a slight increase than the last quarter. Looking at the detail, 35 of these children were Leicestershire LAC with 129 missing episodes, whilst 19 children were out of area LAC with 55 missing episodes.
17. A total number of 243 missing return interviews were completed for Leicestershire children, with 192 of these interviews being completed within 72 hours.

### **Next steps**

18. Leicestershire County Council is committed to working with partners across Leicester City and Rutland to make progress and improve the response to serious youth violence and children who go missing. This work will be led by the Preventing Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Delivery group.
19. In partnership with the Violence Reduction Network (VRN) and colleagues within educational settings across Leicestershire, the Child Exploitation Service is looking at preventative work with young children. The CE Service recognises that there is a good level of quality work being provided in schools and aims to support educational colleagues to support young children with the right tools, by ensuring their knowledge of child exploitation is up to date. The Child Exploitation Service attends the Schools Network Meeting chaired by the VRN where this work is being progressed.
20. On 18 March 2025, following a successful day in March 2024, Leicestershire County Council alongside partners in Leicester City and Rutland will deliver the Child Exploitation Awareness Day. The theme for the day will focus on the lived experiences of parents and carers whose children have been sexually or criminally exploited. This event will take place at Enderby Police Station, which has the facilities to enable the opportunity to reach a wider audience.

### **Conclusions**

21. The report highlights the positive partnership work that continues to take place within the Vulnerability Hub and how this has been reinforced with the feedback from Ofsted. The report also demonstrates the changing nature of child exploitation and the council's commitment to learn from audits and modify our services for where they are needed. Adapting to the changing landscape of child exploitation remains a priority for the Child Exploitation Service.

### **Background papers**

22. None.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

23. None.

### **Equality Implications**

24. The Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Equality Act 2010 and aligns practice with the Children and Family Services core values and behaviours that underpin all work undertaken with children, young people and their families. This includes being aspirational, being curious, being collaborative, listening to children and families, building relationships and improving outcomes for those children and families.

### **Human Rights Implications**

25. As with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Human Rights Act (1998) and ensures those using and delivering services are supported and respected under the principles of Fairness, Respect, Equality, Dignity and Autonomy. As such, the Service is focused on ensuring that all agencies supporting a child being exploited, first and foremost see the child behind the behaviour and to move away from a “blaming” culture.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - LCC Children Criminal Exploitation Framework

Appendix B – MAC TOR 2024

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