



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
4 NOVEMBER 2025

LEICESTERSHIRE'S RESPONSE TO TACKLING CHILD CRIMINAL
EXPLOITATION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of 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.

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.

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.
5. A Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) attended by representatives from LLR, Police and Health 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 officer from the dedicated Police Child Exploitation team and a social worker from the Child Exploitation team based in the Hub.
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 and additional statutory and third centre attend these meetings to provide updates on the safeguarding intervention that is taking place for

children identified as being at high risk of exploitation, and to also provide multi-agency oversight and agreement if a child is downgraded to medium or low risk.

7. In January 2024, the Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Operations Group amalgamated with the Serious Youth Violence (SYV) Group. The group is now called Preventing Child Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Delivery group. This group is a sub-group of the Adolescent Safety and Diversion Board, and it is tasked with leading the priority: Embedding 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 Multi Agency Child Exploitation meeting 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 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 the multi-agency approach to combating child exploitation. The feedback the Child Exploitation service received was positive and validated the work being achieved within the Vulnerability Hub:

"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.

Activity and Updates

9. On 18 March 2025, for Child Exploitation Awareness Day, the Child Exploitation team organised and delivered an awareness raising day to staff within LLR Children's Social Care and external agencies. This was held at Leicestershire Police Force Head Quarters and attended by police colleagues and colleagues from education, health and some third sector agencies. Leicestershire's Child Exploitation Team focused their theme on the voice of the parents of exploited children. A video was created with a parent of a child who had been criminally exploited and demonstrated their experiences on the journey that their child took. This was a very powerful video which was well received by everyone who attended. Permission has been provided by this parent for the video to be used as a training tool and the Child Exploitation team have shared this with various sections of Children's Services and education establishments. The team were supported to deliver the training with colleagues from Police and Health. Positive feedback was received from attendees.

10. Over the last eight months, Leicestershire's Child Exploitation Team has been committed to addressing how high risk children who experience risks beyond the home environment are managed. Guided by the learning and frameworks developed by Carlene Firmin (a British social researcher and writer specialising in violence between and against young people, creator of the concept Contextual Safeguarding), Leicestershire's Child Exploitation Team have collaborated with colleagues in the Safeguarding team to identify an approach to safeguarding that supports practitioners to recognise and respond to the harm young people experience outside of the home.
11. The approach to managing contextual safeguarding is to develop Harm outside the Home (HoTH) meetings. The meetings will be delivered through a lens of safeguarding and child welfare, where the primary risk is harm outside the home, and they are deemed to be suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and as such will be chaired by independent chairs who also chair Child Protection Conferences. Harm Outside the Home meetings will be held following a Child and Family Assessment, when it is deemed that the context is one in which young people are at risk of significant harm. As such the meeting focuses on findings of the assessment including risks, vulnerabilities and strengths with associated actions. A proportion of the meeting is used to discuss an intervention plan (Community Safety Plan) and to task actions to agencies and partners. The focus and attendees of the meeting will vary depending on the context and will include practitioners and agencies who can influence the nature of that context, such as district councils, local businesses etc. The young people who are subject of Harm Outside the Home meetings will be allocated to a social worker within the Child Exploitation Team, who will hold case responsibility for progressing the young person's Community Safety plan.
12. The implementation of Harm Outside the Home meetings has taken time to embed, largely due to the need to adopt new ways of working that differ from established practice. This shift has required thoughtful coordination across services, adjustments in approach, and the development of shared understanding, all of which take time to establish effectively. While progress has been steady, the commitment to ensuring these meetings are purposeful and well-integrated remains strong.
13. The Service is actively working with regional partners to share learning and strengthen collective understanding of the complexities involved in implementing Harm Outside the Home meetings. This collaboration has provided valuable opportunities to reflect on emerging practice, explore different approaches, and identify what supports effective implementation. By engaging in open dialogue and joint problem-solving, the Service and partners are building a more consistent and informed response to contextual safeguarding across the region, ensuring that young people experiencing harm beyond the home receive the most appropriate and coordinated support.

Performance and Activity

14. 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; and,
 - iii. Missing children.

15. CSE data for Leicestershire in Q1 recorded 16 referrals. The Child Exploitation Screening tool was completed for all 16 referrals. The data from these screening tools indicate that the 14-15 years age bracket was the most dominant age bracket, which is different to Q1 in 2023-24 where 16-17 years was the dominant age bracket. North West Leicestershire was the geographical area which generated the most referrals at seven of the 16. The Service allocated seven of the 16 referrals to the Child Exploitation team. Online exploitation continues to play a part in most of the referrals. In Q2 there was an increase to 29 referrals for a total of 21 individual children. The dominant age group was 14-15 years, with all of these being for females.
16. CCE data for Leicestershire in Q1 recorded 34 referrals for 31 children, with the dominant age group being 14-15 years old. There is an even geographical split between North West Leicestershire and Hinckley and Bosworth which is reflective of the activity in these areas. The Service had seven children placed outside of Leicestershire who were referred to the Child Exploitation team in this quarter. In Q2 there was an increase to 47 referrals for 45 individual children. Overall, the 16-17 age bracket was dominant; however, this was only one more than the 14-15 age bracket. Geographically, Hinckley and Bosworth generated the most referrals, which is representative of the activity in this area. The Service is supporting 12 of the 13 children referred to us from this area.
17. Missing data for non-looked after children (non-LAC), in Q1 shows that there were 66 episodes for 38 individuals, with an even split of 19 females and 19 males. Q2 shows that there were 77 missing episodes for 49 individuals, with 30 females and 19 males having missing episodes.
18. Missing data for looked after children (LAC) during Q1 was 197 episodes with 108 episodes attributed to 28 females and 89 episodes to 27 males. Looking at the detail, 21 of these children were Leicestershire LAC with 82 missing episodes, whilst 39 children were out of area LAC with 115 missing episodes. During Q2 there were 265 missing episodes with 104 episodes attributed to 37 females and 161 episodes attributed to 56 males. The detail of these missing episodes are 36 children were Leicestershire LAC with 148 missing episodes, whilst 57 children were out of area LAC with 117 missing episodes.
19. In Q1 a total number of 144 missing return interviews were completed for Leicestershire children. Missing Return Interviews were not completed for a total of four episodes for Leicestershire children, both non-LAC and LAC due to circumstances relating to the child. In Q2 a total number of 185 missing return interviews were completed for Leicestershire children. Missing return interviews were not completed for a total of five episodes for Leicestershire children, both non-LAC and LAC due to circumstances relating to the child.

Next steps

20. Leicestershire County Council are committed to working with partners across Leicester City and Rutland to progress and improve our 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.

21. As the Service continues to embed Harm Outside the Home (HoTH) meetings into safeguarding practice, the next phase of development will focus on reviewing and refining the systems that support this work. This includes ensuring that recording, tracking, and information-sharing mechanisms are aligned with the principles of contextual safeguarding and enable effective multi-agency collaboration. By strengthening the infrastructure around HoTH meetings, the Service aims to enhance consistency, improve oversight, and ensure that interventions are both timely and impactful for the young people we support.
22. On 18 March 2026, Leicestershire County Council alongside partners in Leicester City and Rutland will deliver the Child Exploitation Awareness Day. The aim of this day, as in previous events will be to 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

Conclusions

23. 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 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

24. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

25. None.

Equality Implications

26. The Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Equality Act 2010 and aligns our practice with the Children and Family Services core values and behaviours that underpin everything that we do with children, young people and their families such as being aspirational, being curious, being collaborative, listening to what children and families are telling us, building relationships and improving outcomes for the children and families we work with.

Human Rights Implications

27. 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.

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