



Child Exploitation

Recognition, Referral, Risk and Response

1. Definition and Characteristics of Child Exploitation

A child or young person may be exploited in a number of ways. Those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and/or economic or other resources. Involvement in exploitation is often characterized by the child or young person's limited availability of choice resulting from their social/economic and/or emotional vulnerability. Being exploited can have a considerable long- term impact on every aspect of the child or young person's life, health and education.

Child Exploitation

"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" DfE 2017.

The abusive relationship between victim and perpetrator involves an imbalance of power which limits the victim's options. It is a form of abuse which is often misunderstood by victims and outsiders as consensual. Although it is true that the victim can be tricked into believing they are in a loving relationship, no child under the age of 18 can ever consent to being abused or exploited (Barnardo's 2012).

The manipulation or 'grooming' process is often a characteristic of child exploitation and involves befriending children, gaining their trust, and often providing them with drugs and alcohol, sometimes over a long period of time, before the abuse begins.

Exploitation can also occur without physical contact when children are persuaded or forced to post indecent images of themselves online, participate in non-contact sexual activities via a webcam or smartphone, engage in sexual conversations on a mobile phone.

Exploitation can also involve opportunistic or organised networks of perpetrators who may profit financially from trafficking young victims between different locations to engage in sexual activity with multiple men (Barnardo's 2011). It can involve an older perpetrator exercising financial, emotional, or physical control over a child/young person. It can involve peers manipulating or forcing victims into sexual activity, sometimes within gangs and in gang-affected neighbourhoods. The dangers to girls and young women from gangs – including the risk of sexual exploitation are potentially significant.

Criminal Exploitation - County Lines

Another type of exploitation occurs through the involvement of children and young people in 'county lines' or gangs for financial gain. A 'county line' is a telephone number established by a criminal group in an area outside of their own locality, in order to sell drugs directly to drug users. Children and young people may be recruited either in the area in which the line originated or from the local area and used to run the operations on the ground. This can include delivering drugs and money between locations, staying in safe houses to look after the drugs and money or, in some cases, selling and storing drugs.

The use of debt is also a common feature in the exploitation of children and young people. They may be groomed by a member of the group who will give them money and/or gifts; they will then be told that they owe money before being threatened and forced to take part in drug dealing. In addition, whilst in possession of drugs, children and young people may become victims of a staged robbery; they are then told they must work for free to replace the cost of the stolen drugs. Violence, coercion, and intimidation are common tactics used to involve the child or young person in these behaviours. Threats are also made to children and young people so they feel compelled to undertake the activity.

Some children and young people may think of themselves as willing participants in county lines and not consider themselves to be victims of exploitation, particularly when they believe they will be rewarded financially or with higher status in the group. Children and young people exploited in this way are at risk of becoming both perpetrators and victims of violence.

Child Trafficking

Children can be trafficked into the country from abroad. Children resident in the UK can also become victims of trafficking and be moved within a town or between locations for the purposes of exploitation. Exploitation includes children being used for sex work, domestic work, restaurant, sweatshop, drug dealing, shoplifting and benefit fraud.

Often children and young people do not know that they have been trafficked. They may

not want to tell their story for fear of not being believed, not knowing they are victims of crimes or fear of getting into trouble. They may still be under the control of their traffickers or exploiters. Even though a child may have been trafficked for a purpose other than sexual exploitation, they become highly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse once they have been trafficked. Sexual exploitation of children is most likely to occur in informal locations, such as private flats. The use of trafficking for exploitative labour is often hidden and can be difficult to identify without the support of local communities.

Risk indicators can include children who have unexplained moves, have not been enrolled into school or attended a GP practice, are being cared for by adult/s who are not their parents, are not in possession of their own travel documents, children who go missing from home or care, or unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

Radicalisation

The government's PREVENT Strategy is intended to avoid people, including children and young people, becoming terrorists, or supporting violent extremism in all of its forms. An objective of the strategy is to prevent people from being drawn into extremism and ensure they are given appropriate advice and support. There are indicators that *may* suggest vulnerability to violent extremism which include:

Expressed opinions – this could include support for violence and terrorism or the values of extremist organisations, airing of political or religious based grievances, unaccepting of other nationalities, religions, or cultures.

Material – possession of extremist literature; attempts to access extremist websites and associated password protected chat rooms; possession of material regarding weapons, explosives or military training

Behaviour and behavioural changes – such as withdrawal from family and peers; hostility towards former associates and family; association with proscribed organisations and those that hold extremist views

Personal history – this could include claims or evidence of involvement in organisations voicing violent extremist ideology and identifying with their cause.

Channel is a Multi-Agency Process, which provides support to those who may be vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. *Channel* uses existing collaboration between partners to support individuals and protect them from being drawn into terrorism. Examples of support provided could include mentoring, diversionary activities such as sport, signposting to mainstream services such as education, employment or housing. The *Channel* process can access the use of an 'intervention provider'. This is Home Office funded and uses those on an approved list to work with individuals around their individual ideologies.

Children Missing from Home or Care

Most children and young people who go missing return the same day and some incidents concern children who are late home and for whom there are no other concerns. However, very often running away/going missing is an indicator of

underlying problems which need further intervention such as:

- Problems at home /family conflict
- Abuse or neglect
- Mental health problems, bullying.
- Pressure from friends/associates
- Sexual exploitation/trafficking

Young people who run away may be at risk of significant harm, including exploitation, whilst away from home or care placement, for example those who remain missing overnight or for several days, sleeping rough and in contact with people posing a risk to them.

Police will lead efforts to locate children who are missing, working closely with Children's Social Care when children are missing from care placements. When the child is located the Police will carry out an immediate 'Safe and Well Check' to identify any indications that the young person has suffered harm, where and with whom they have been and to give them an opportunity to disclose any offending by, or against, them.

Police, Children's Social Care and any agency involved with a child who has run away/gone missing will share information and where necessary take action to safeguard or offer support to the child and family. Arrangements will be made for a 'return interview' to be carried out whenever there is any indication of concern about a child or young person. This will build on information gained from the Police Safe and Well Check and serve to identify any harm the child may have suffered understand and address the reasons why the child ran away and consider preventive measures regarding further running away.

Whilst different types of exploitation have been described separately within this document it is important to understand that they may co-exist and are not mutually exclusive.

The processes described below apply to children and young people thought to be at risk of child sexual abuse but will broadly apply to any individual child thought to be at risk of other forms of exploitation. However, risk assessment toolkits are only in place for children and young people thought to be at risk of child sexual exploitation and gang involvement.

2. Pre-Referral

- Suffolk Local Safeguarding Children Board has a range of information available on their website summarizing the pre-disposing risk factors for child exploitation and these are available to all professionals working with children and young people.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) *Professional Consultation Line* is available to any professional who wishes to discuss their concerns about a child or young person with whom they are working, or of whom they are aware, and to seek professional advice as to the most appropriate way to obtain the help they need.
- Every partner organisation has a safeguarding lead able to provide a point of advice and information for colleagues in respect of child exploitation.
- The Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership website has a dedicated Child Exploitation area that includes access to the Child Exploitation Strategy, procedural guidance and the risk assessment toolkits for assessing the nature and level of risk of child exploitation. [Child Exploitation](#)
- The Suffolk Youth Justice Service has expertise in working with young people at risk of gang involvement or already involved with gangs or county lines. Staff have received specialist training and have access to specialist interventions in this area.

3. Referral

- Any professional who is concerned that a child or young person may be at risk of, or is actually suffering, exploitation is able to make a referral via the Portal to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). If the risk is imminent a referral can be made by telephone and then followed up with a completed MARF within 24 hours.
- The redesigned MARF lists Child Sexual Exploitation amongst a number of risk factors also including E-safety, Female Genital Mutilation, Forced Marriage, Human Trafficking, Vulnerability to Radicalisation, and Criminal Exploitation. The Child Sexual Exploitation risk provides a hyperlink to the Child Exploitation area on the Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership website which enables access for professional guidance and access to the Child Exploitation Risk Assessment toolkit and the Criminal Exploitation toolkit. The SSP website also has guidance for professionals in respect of all other forms of exploitation.
- When making a referral, in which child sexual exploitation is thought to be a risk factor, the referrer is prompted to complete the Child Exploitation Toolkit, provide any further information that may be available, and to rate the risk to the child by use of a 'drop down' box at the end of the form. Guidance as to how to proceed with other forms of exploitations is included on the SSP website.
- On review of the form the child may be considered by police colleagues as being a potential victim of a sexual or other crime which would identify them as being potentially vulnerable to exploitation. In such circumstances, the attending officer/s or member of police staff will submit a Police child referral to the MASH. Where the officer identifies indicators of potential CSE they will also flag this on the investigation record.

- Where the referral indicates a risk of CE the Safeguarding Manager is informed and a safeguarding strategy meeting is arranged involving the MAC team and the Specialist Team who are allocated the Section 47/Statutory Assessment.

4. Risk Assessment and Multi-Agency Information Sharing

The MASH operating procedures are set out in detail elsewhere. The following is a summary of how the MASH deals specifically with contacts for which child exploitation is considered to be a risk.

Customer First

- On receipt of a referral, *Customer First* check Liquid Logic to determine whether there is an existing social work allocation for the child or a sibling living in the same household. Where this is the case, details of the contact are recorded on Liquid Logic and the information sent to the allocated team.

MASH: BRAG Rating

All contacts coming into the MASH are subject to an initial 'trawl' for information before being BRAG rated by Consultant Social Workers. The ratings and associated timescales are summarised below:

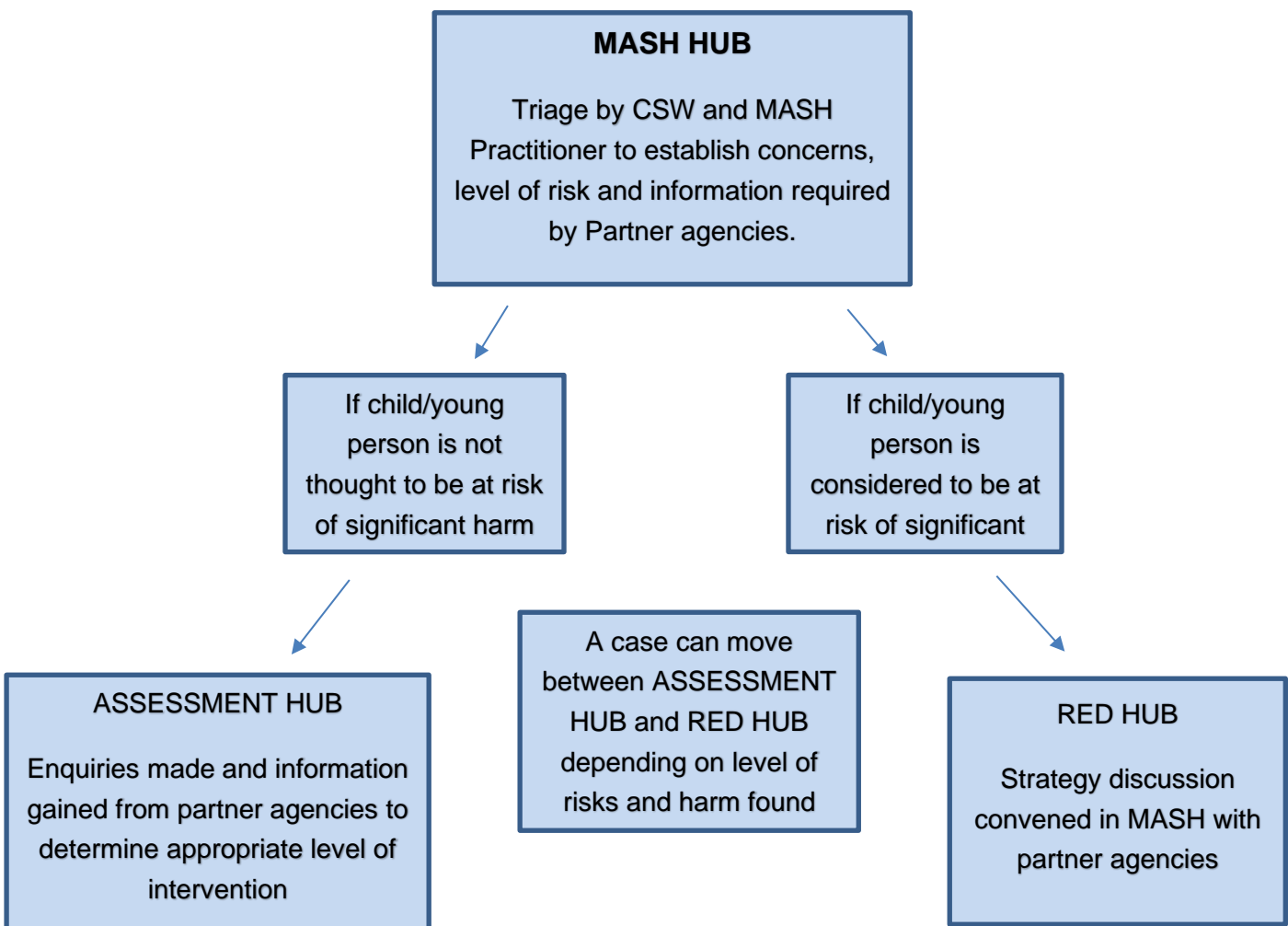
BRAG Rating	Action	Timescale
RED	Immediate and/or serious safeguarding concern requiring action to ensure safety of the child and possibly to secure and preserve evidence that might otherwise be lost as there is 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm' (Children Act 1989 Sec 47). Should include cases where there is an urgency to conclude on the same working day, e.g. Homelessness or requests for Local Welfare Assistance.	As soon as possible and within four hours
AMBER	There are significant concerns but immediate urgent action is not required to safeguard the child.	As soon as possible and within 24 hours
GREEN	Any contacts where further information is needed to determine what intervention is required	As soon as possible and within 72 hours
BLUE	Contact does not require information sharing and will be resolved	

The following flowchart summarises the specific actions taken in the MASH in circumstances where the child contact indicates a risk of child exploitation; the risk factors are evaluated by the Consultant Social Worker and MASH Practitioner who will complete the CSE Toolkit where a risk of CSE is indicated. Use of the toolkit will enable the level of risk to be assessed which will then

determine the service response.

The level of assessed risk will determine the subsequent point of intervention as described below in Section 5.

Child Exploitation



5. Assessment, Planning and Intervention

Early Help

- In cases where the threshold for a Statutory Assessment or S47 Strategy Discussion is not met (as described in 'low level risk': 1-4 indicators above) the child may be referred by the MASH to the appropriate Early Help Team for further assessment through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).
- Should further assessment through the CAF process conclude that the level of risk does, in fact, meet the threshold for Statutory Assessment the case will be 'stepped up' to the corresponding Social Care Team.
- In cases where the threshold continues not to be met but the CAF indicates that some level of support and intervention is required the Early Help Team will intervene through the Family Network Meeting and Lead professional arrangements.
- Should a child or young person with whom an Early Help Team is already working appear to be at risk of exploitation, the Toolkit will be completed to assess the level of risk. If the risk is assessed to be above level 1-4, and meet the need for Statutory Assessment, the case will be 'stepped up' to the corresponding Social Care Team

S47 Strategy Discussion and Statutory Assessment

- For cases not currently 'open' to a Social Care team, all risk assessed to be above level 1-4 described in the flowchart above will result in a S47 Strategy Discussion being undertaken and a referral to the appropriate Children's Social Care Team for Statutory Assessment.
- In cases where the assessment concludes that the threshold is met for the likelihood of *significant harm* an Initial Child Protection Conference will be held within 15 days to determine whether there is a need for a multi-agency Child Protection Plan. The case will subsequently be held within the Social Care Team.
- In cases where the threshold for *significant harm* is not met the Social Assessment will be completed to determine whether the threshold is met for the child to be *in need* of support and services. If the child is assessed to be *in need* the case will subsequently be held within the Social Care Team.
- If the assessment concludes that the child's circumstances do not meet the threshold for statutory intervention but that the child and family would benefit from additional support the case will be 'stepped down', with the family's consent, for Early Help or other relevant services that may be available.

Continuing Casework within all Children's Social Care Teams

- Circumstances may give rise to concern that a child with whom a Social worker is currently working could be at risk of exploitation. Where this is the case there is an expectation that the Social Worker will assess the risk using appropriate toolkits where available. In cases of suspected child sexual exploitation there is an expectation that the CSE Toolkit will be used.
- Where, through use of available toolkits, a risk of exploitation including CSE is assessed to be present, and above level 1-4, a S47 Strategy Discussion will be undertaken to determine the most proportionate protective action. This may result in a S47 strategy meeting and joint enquiry being undertaken by police and Social Care.

- If the child is *in need* and the outcome of the enquiry concludes that the threshold for *significant harm* is met an Initial Child Protection Conference will be held to determine whether there is a need for a multi-agency Child Protection Plan.
- If the child is already subject of a Child Protection Plan the Core Group will meet to determine what changes to the Child Protection Plan are required to ensure that the child is protected.

NB: In circumstances where teams other than Social Care believe children and young people with whom they are working may be at risk of exploitation they will use the appropriate toolkit to assess the level of risk and, where indicated, refer through the MASH as described in Section 3 of this guidance.

Looked After Children and Care Leavers

- All statutory Reviews for Looked After children will consider whether any form of child exploitation is a risk factor for the child. Where there is reason to believe that this may be the case the child's Social Worker will use the relevant toolkit, where available, and their professional judgement to assess the nature and level of risk. Concern about the risk of CE may emerge at any time between Statutory Reviews; in these circumstances the child's Social Worker will follow the action outlined above as soon as concerns arise.
- Where the risk of CE is assessed to be present and above level 1-4 a S47 Strategy Discussion will be undertaken to determine the most proportionate protective action. This may result in a joint enquiry to be undertaken by police and Social Care.
- If the outcome of the enquiry concludes that the threshold for *significant harm* is met an Initial Child Protection Conference will be held to determine whether there is a need for a multi-agency Child Protection Plan. Suffolk's policy in relation to Looked After children for whom there are child protection concerns is that, in most circumstances, the Looked After status and associated statutory processes ensure sufficient protection for the child. However, child sexual exploitation is an exception to this and dual planning processes will be used to ensure a well-coordinated response to the risk identified.
- If the child is "a relevant" care leaver and the outcome of the enquiry concludes that the threshold for *significant harm* is met an initial Child Protection Conference will be held to determine whether there is a need for a multi-agency Child Protection Plan. As in the case of Looked After children, the child protection process and the pathway planning which is already in place should be well coordinated.
- For care leavers aged 18 and over (i.e. "former relevant" or "qualifying") for whom there is thought to be a risk of exploitation, risk assessment and management will take place within the pathway planning process already in place with the relevant adult safeguarding procedures being followed, as appropriate.

NB: At all stages of assessment, planning and intervention described in Section 5 staff in Early Help and all Social Care Teams are able to refer to the *Make A Change* Team for advice, information, consultation and direct intervention depending on the particular circumstances of the child with whom they are working.

In relation to the risk of or actual involvement with criminal exploitation/ County Lines, Early Help and all Social Care Teams are able to refer directly to the *Suffolk Youth Justice Team* for advice, information, consultation and direct intervention depending on the

particular circumstances of the child with whom they are working.

6. Intervention: Make A Change Team

- The *Make A Change* Team is the Children and Young Person's specialist team working with Child Exploitation in Suffolk. The team is routinely informed of any young person for whom their assessment indicates a risk of CSE and is able to monitor those cases to ensure a proportionate response.
- The team is able to offer support to young people at risk of CSE and their families in a number of ways:
 - **Advice and information** – the team holds a wide range of materials to assist young people to stay safe in relationships. Advice can be provided to young people and other family members about low level concerns in order to prevent behaviours becoming more risky.
 - **Consultation for professionals** – the team offers direct professional consultation for staff in Early Help and all Children's Social Care Teams in their casework with children and families for whom there is believed to be a risk of any form of child sexual exploitation.
 - **Direct work with young people and families** – where there is clear evidence of risk or actual harm associated with child sexual exploitation the *Make A Change* Team will become directly involved with young people and their families subject to a referral to the team from the caseholder. The *Make A Change* Team will not become case responsible but will work alongside the caseholder to provide a specialist intervention. The *Make A Change* Team member is able to attend ABE interviews as support to the young person, attend strategy meetings, be directly involved in case planning and work face to face with the young person and other family members as agreed with the caseworker. The aim of the intervention will always be to reduce the level of risk to the young person.
 - **The *Make A Change* Team co-ordinates and facilitates all multiple victim operations** - MAC Team Social Workers will conduct the ABE interviews when appropriate (or the allocated social worker if this is considered to be in the best interest of the child). The team's responsibilities in multiple investigations will include identifying links to other children, possible further victims and perpetrators. The co-ordinated approach allows for the enquiry to be managed within one team, always in consultation with the allocated social worker for the child.
 - In circumstances where it is needed the team are able to identify and arrange specialist therapeutic support for young people who have suffered harm as a consequence of CSE.
 - All of the *Make A Change* Team's contacts and interventions are recorded on the young person's case record.
 - **Raising awareness** - the team work with professional networks in all localities in Suffolk to maintain an awareness of the issues relating to child sexual exploitation
 - The *Make A Change* team plays a significant role in the function of the Tactical Tasking and Coordination Group which monitors, in conjunction with the police, the 10 most vulnerable missing children. *Make A Change* staff collate

information to be presented to the panel and ensure actions resulting are in place and followed up by allocated social workers.

7. Interventions Suffolk Youth Justice Service

- The Suffolk Youth Justice Service is a multi-agency service which works with children and young people at risk of or involved in offending of anti-social behaviour in Suffolk. As well as supervising young people on statutory court orders, the service offers a comprehensive prevention and early intervention service known as The Diversion Programme. SYJS also hosts the Suffolk Sexually Appropriate Behaviour Service which works with young people who commit harmful sexual behaviour (HSB).
- The service is able to offer support to young people at risk of criminal exploitation and their caregivers in a number of ways:
 - **Advice and information** – the service holds a wide range of specific evidence based interventions aimed at young people at risk of offending or anti-social behaviour including those at risk of, or already involved, in gang or county line activity. Advice can be provided to young people and other family members about low-level concerns in order to prevent behaviours becoming more risky.
 - **Consultation for professionals** – the team offers direct professional consultation for staff in Early Help and Children’s Social Care Teams in their casework with children and families for whom there is believed to be a risk of gang or county line involvement.
 - **Direct work with young people and families** – Subject to meeting referral criteria, SYJS will work directly with children and young people at risk of gang involvement or already involved in gang or county line activity and their families. SYJS will not usually become case responsible but will work alongside the case holder to provide specialist interventions as agreed with the case holder. Direct referrals can also be taken from the Police and education settings.
 - **Raising awareness** - the service works in partnership with other agencies, not just with Children and Young People’s Services but across the criminal justice system, and with community safety across Suffolk to raise awareness of the safeguarding and risk of harm issues relating to county line and gang involvement.

8. Quality Assurance

- The Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership will schedule activities in relation to Child Exploitation as part of the yearly quality assurance programme monitored by the Learning and Improvement Group. This may include multi-agency audit and/or a review of a case samples.
- CYPS undertakes routine learning audits which include a section on recognition and response to new or emerging risks to the child, specifically where there is evidence of vulnerability to child exploitation or other risks specific to adolescents. These might include going missing, self-harming, drugs / alcohol use, absence from school, gang membership. Any actions required on individual cases are escalated by the responsible practitioner and manager. Themes from the learning audits are considered by CYPS Quality, Engagement and Performance Board.
- CYPS compiles and issues a monthly list of the high-risk children going missing, circulated to all managers, and Heads of Service, to check that safeguarding procedures are in place.
- There is a Safeguarding Manager with a specific lead for Missing Children/ Child Exploitation who will be involved in identifying any systemic issues related to the safeguarding of children from risk of exploitation.
- The role of the Child Exploitation Co-ordinator includes a responsibility to participate in quality assurance activities.

Agency Updates

Agency/Update	Date	Author
Suffolk Youth Offending Service Amendment to text within Section 7.	5 th June 2017	Jen Meade
Suffolk Youth Justice Service, the SSP and MASH.	March 2021	Cath Bennett, Tracy Murphy and Amanda Fulcher.