

Summary

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NYSCP carried out a deep dive multi-agency audit into complex child exploitation cases in North Yorkshire. The audit considered four of the most complex cases involving children who currently or had been open to NYCC Children & Families Service and had a child exploitation risk status.

What is Child Exploitation?

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Child Exploitation refers to the use of a child for someone else's advantage, gratification or profit often resulting in the child being abused physically, sexually, emotionally and financially. The two main forms of child exploitation recognised are:

- **Child Sexual Exploitation:** 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 technology¹.
- **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 technology².

What did the audit find – areas working well?

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- **Quality of Recognition:** The quality of recognition of exploitation and/or risk of exploitation across the cases was good, with relevant services promptly identifying the vulnerabilities and risk factors posed by child exploitation.
- **Quality of Assessment:** The introduction of a North Yorkshire specific child exploitation risk assessment is a positive development and enables professionals to capture the risk more accurately within a multi-agency approach and identify co-ordinated actions to take forward.
- **Planning & Intervention:** Planning and intervention around the child's risk to exploitation was exceptional. There was an example of services working in partnership to mitigate the difficulty in engaging a child on a 1-2-1 basis. Services delivered targeted group provision with the child and their peer group, resulting in increased engagement. This highlighted the value in services being able to respond dynamically to work with a child in a way that feels most comfortable to them.
- **Joint Working:** The continued development of the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Level 2 locality groups was highly valuable in monitoring exploitation risk, share appropriate information between agencies, plan coordinate interventions and hold agencies to account.
- **Mapping to Mitigate and Manage Risk:** In a number of instances, MACE locality groups carried out mapping exercises to focus on how to contextually safeguard a child and their peer group. This was an effective and a creative approach to ensuring partners had a coordinated approach to identify opportunities to effectively safeguard a child from harm. In one case, agencies were able to plan ahead through mapping to ensure arrangements were in place to safeguarding a child who was on the cusp of becoming 18 years old by working with adult services.

What did the audit find – areas for development?

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- Information Sharing: Information sharing would have been aided further by YJS representation at initial Level 1 Child Exploitation Risk Assessment discussions held within MAST and commissioned services in North Yorkshire being in receipt of Child Exploitation Risk Assessments. 0-19 HDFT recognised Child Exploitation Risk Assessments need uploading onto SystemOne to enable frontline health professionals to access this information.
- Professional Curiosity: Professional curiosity would have been strengthened by Return To Home Interviews providing more detailed information on a child's whereabouts, associations and movements whilst they were missing. This detail was limited and as a result presented challenges in being able to update the risk and management plan.
- Conflicting Views: In one case of criminal exploitation in the initial case management there were differing views held by Police and Social Care around the identification of the child as a victim, leading to differing approaches being taken. Since this audit has been undertaken work has commenced to develop a more robust approach through North Yorkshire's MACE arrangements. Police are also developing a new information management system that will assist with the management of information linked to exploitation risk.
- Disruption: Exploitation disruption tactics and tools needed wider understanding by professionals and action coordinated with safety planning. Proactive targeting of individuals was evident however due to the complexities for the case this disruption was not always successful at eliminating or reducing risk.

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What will NYSCP do with these findings?

NYSCP to disseminate information in relation to:

- The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process with anonymised case examples to illustrate the importance a positive outcome can have
- Promote the importance of using appropriate terminology to describe perpetrators or individuals who may pose a risk of harm by exploitation, in particular the identification of risk and terminology used where the risk may initially present less clear (for example peer on peer)
- Develop improved understanding of exploitation linked to roles and responsibilities within the education sector

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Next steps

- All agencies involved in the audit will feedback specific good practice and areas for development identified for their service during the audit day discussion.
- The findings of the deep dive audit into complex cases of child exploitation will be shared with the NYSCP Learning and Improvement Subgroup who will agree and adopt identified actions onto the subgroup's overarching action plan to seek assurance learning from the audit is implemented and monitored.

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Resources

There are a range of national and local resources and guidance which can support professionals in relation to preventing and supporting children who are at risk of or experiencing child exploitation. To access these resources and guidance please visit NYSCP's dedicated Child Exploitation webpage [here](#).

1 Department for Education (2017) Child Sexual Exploitation: definition and guide for practitioners

2 Home Office (2017) Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance