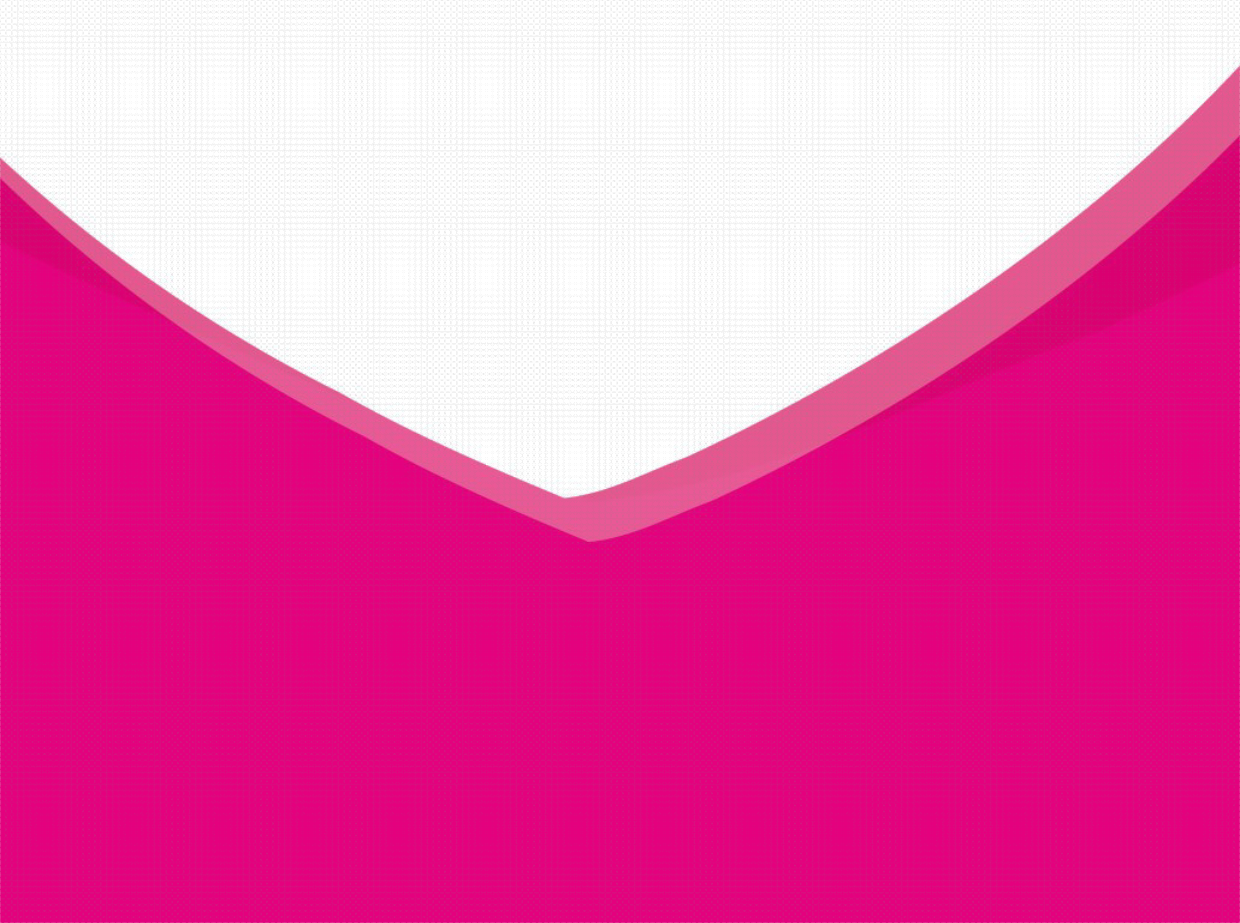
 

**Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy**



2019 - 2021

A multi-agency strategy to help and protect vulnerable adolescents

# Children and Young people’s Introduction.

Children and young people were consulted as part of this strategy. They had four key points that they wanted professionals to consider.

1. A strategy for Vulnerable Adolescents is required.
2. Think about the child/young person behind the behaviours, try to understand what is happening for us.
3. You were all adolescents, please try to put yourself in our shoes.
4. Teenagers take risks - it is a normal part of growing up and making the steps to adulthood. However that does not mean that we do not need guidance.

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# Contents

[Children and Young people’s Introduction. 2](#_Toc16763678)

[Contents 3](#_Toc16763679)

[Vision 4](#_Toc16763680)

[Definitions 4](#_Toc16763681)

[Key Partners and Stakeholders to the Strategy 8](#_Toc16763682)

[Key Drivers 8](#_Toc16763683)

[Towards Safe Uncertainty 10](#_Toc16763684)

[A Unified Approach 11](#_Toc16763685)

[The Top 10 Objectives 13](#_Toc16763686)

[Key Success Measures 14](#_Toc16763687)

[Holding Agencies to Account 16](#_Toc16763688)

[Governance and Consultation 16](#_Toc16763689)

[Evaluation and Review 16](#_Toc16763690)

[The Action Plan 16](#_Toc16763691)

[Appendix 1 20](#_Toc16763692)

[Appendix 2 21](#_Toc16763693)

# Vision

Everyone working with children and young people in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly can identify the signs of vulnerability in a variety of contexts and understands the factors that may increase the likelihood of children and young people experiencing harm and being targeted by abusers. Multi-agency work involving vulnerable adolescents is focused on the reduction of vulnerability and building resilience, taking a developmentally appropriate approach to safeguarding young people from harm, abuse and exploitation:

* Children and young people are educated and empowered. They better understand the range of risks that they can face as they grow up and are supported to develop healthy friendships and relationships
* Children and young people have a good understanding of what represents a healthy relationship and recognize when they are being are being exploited and abused
* Children and young people have the strength and confidence to tell someone when they are uncomfortable or unhappy about what is happening to them
* The people they tell listen to them, believe them and know what to do to safeguard them from harm, abuse and exploitation
* Adolescents who are vulnerable are identified, safeguarded and supported for as long as they need
* New, innovative partnership approaches are implemented. Relevant interventions are developed that address risk and harness the strength of peer relationships
* The nature of public spaces change and those responsible for these spaces are empowered to initiate and participate in child protection processes
* A safeguarding adolescents system is in place that focuses upon changing public and social environments (including schools) where adolescents may encounter significant harm, rather than relocating them to remove them from harmful contexts
* Those who seek to harm or exploit children are identified, disrupted and convicted. Robust offender management post-conviction and/or effective intervention strategies reduce the risk presented by identified abusers

# Definitions

**Adolescence** is a transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to legal adulthood (11-17) and is often referred to as the teenage years. In terms of child development the period of adolescence is recognised as being one of major change – physical, cognitive, social and psychodynamic, when a key goal for an individual is ‘discovery of self’ (Scannapieco and Connell- Carrick, 2005).

A powerful combination of biological, psychological and social changes make adolescents more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours than children or adults, and these changes contribute both to opportunities for healthy growth and the risk of negative outcomes (Calkins, 2010). Experimentation and impulsive behaviour are part of normal teenage experience. With support, most young people navigate these challenges and emerge as healthily functioning adults. However, the interaction of individual, family and environmental factors can greatly increase a young person’s vulnerability to risk and the potentially adverse consequences of risk-taking.

Research and lessons from serious case reviews indicate that whilst young people from all backgrounds can experience significant harm, adolescents with particular problems or in particular situations can be more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. These factors make children more vulnerable, and also make it harder to successfully disrupt and prevent exploitation, and harder to help children recover from these experiences (this list is not definitive):

* **Child Sexual 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 statutory guidance, February 2017*. (Note: There is a separate CSE strategy).
* **Child Sexual Abuse**-

Child sexual abuse “involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.

The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).

Sexual abuse is not perpetrated solely by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.” Extract from 2018- 2021 CIoS CSA strategy.

* **Harmful sexual behaviour**- children and young people who develop harmful sexual behaviour have usually experienced abuse and neglect themselves (Hackett et al 2013; Hawkes 2009; McCartan et al, 2011). A study by Hackett et al (2013) of children and young people with harmful sexual behaviour suggests that two-thirds had experienced some kind of abuse or trauma. Reflecting the context of the wider vulnerabilities set out within this strategy, such abuse and trauma includes physical abuse / emotional abuse / sexual abuse / severe neglect / parental rejection / family breakdown / domestic violence / parental drug and alcohol abuse. Around half of them had experienced sexual abuse.
* **Going missing from home, care or education**- Children may run away from a problem, such as abuse or neglect at home, or to somewhere they want to be. They may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Whatever the reason, it is thought that approximately 25 per cent of children and young people that go missing are at risk of serious harm. There are particular concerns about the links between children running away and the risks of sexual exploitation. Missing children may also be vulnerable to other forms of exploitation, to violent crime, gang exploitation, or to drug and alcohol misuse.
* **Involvement in gangs**- gangs are defined as mainly comprising men and boys aged 13-25 years old, who take part in many forms of criminal activity (e.g. knife crime or robbery) who can engage in violence against other gangs, and who have identifiable markers, for example a territory, a name, or sometimes clothing. Young people associated with gangs are highly vulnerable. Sexual violence amongst peers is commonplace and it is used as a means of power and control over others, most commonly young women. Sexual exploitation is used in gangs to:
  + exert power and control over members
  + Initiate young people into the gang
  + Exchange sexual activity for status or protection
  + Entrap rival gang members by exploiting girls and young women
  + Inflict sexual assault as a weapon in conflict.
* Section 34(5) of the Policing and Crime Act 2009 defines **gang-related drug dealing activity** as: “the unlawful production, supply, importation or exportation of a controlled drug which occurs in the course of, or is otherwise related to, the activities of a group that: a) consists of at least 3 people; and b) has one or more characteristics that enable its members to be identified by others as a group”.
* A **county lines** gang features these additional criteria:
* The gang/gang members are based in or have their origin within an urban city location;
* They have established a market in a county town, into which they supply drugs;
* They utilise a mobile phone number to facilitate drug orders from and supply to customers in the county town;
* Their criminality systematically exploits young and vulnerable persons.
* **Adolescent neglect**- characterised by the absence of a relationship of care between the parent/carer and the child and the failure of the parent/carer to prioritise the needs of their child. It can occur at any stage of childhood, including the teenage years. Adolescents are often viewed as being more resilient than younger children; however, they still need dedicated care to meet their needs. Neglect may arise from parental substance misuse, mental health or learning difficulties. Such environments can provide limited experience of positive parental care, with the incentive to remain at home or in education reducing as a consequence.
* **Organised/networked sexual exploitation or trafficking of young people**- young people can be passed through networks, possibly over geographical distances, between towns and cities where they may be forced/coerced into sexual activity with multiple men. Often this occurs at 'parties' and young people who are involved may recruit others into the network. Organised exploitation varies from spontaneous networking between groups of offenders, to more serious organised crime where young people are effectively 'sold'. Children are known to be trafficked for sexual exploitation and this can occur across local authority boundaries and regions and across international borders.
* **Domestic Violence and Abuse**- Young people growing up in a household where domestic violence occurs may have a skewed understanding of healthy relationships, thus increasing their susceptibility to exploitation in the future.
* **Mental Health and Wellbeing including Self-harm and suicide**- Young people may be at increased risk of self-harming and suicidal behaviour as a result of their experiences. Young people with existing mental health difficulties could also be more susceptible to exploitation. The Mental Health Foundation (2003) defines *deliberate self-harm* as self-harm without suicidal intent, resulting in non-fatal injury; *attempted suicide* as self-harm with intent to take life, resulting in non-fatal injury; and *suicide* as self-harm, resulting in death. Deliberate self-harm is a common precursor to suicide and children and young people who deliberately self-harm may kill themselves by accident. In many cases self-harm remains a secretive behaviour that can go on for a long time without being discovered. Many children and young people may struggle to express their feelings and will need a supportive response to assist them to explore their feelings and behaviour and the possible outcomes for them.
* **Substance Misuse**- Adolescents who use drugs or alcohol problematically are likely to be vulnerable and experiencing a range of problems, of which substance misuse is one. The majority of young people who seek help for substance misuse have emotional or social problems, such as self-harming, offending and family issues. They are also less likely to be in education, employment or training.
* **Extremism**- The Government has defined extremism as “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also include in our definition of extremism calls for the death of members of our armed forces”. Extremist messages can have a powerful impact on someone who is young and vulnerable; possibly unsure of their path in life, and who may lack confidence.
* **Radicalisation**- Children and young people can be radicalised in different ways. They can be groomed either online or in person by people who hold harmful, extreme beliefs seeking to draw them into extremist activity. They can be exposed to violent, anti-social, extremist imagery, rhetoric and writings which can lead to the development of a distorted world view in which extremist ideology seems reasonable. They may witness propaganda which seeks to radicalise.
* **Female genital mutilation (FGM)-** This includes procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genitals for non-medical reasons.
* **Forced marriage and ‘honour-based’ abuse**- Both can involve violent sexual behaviours as a means of coercing individuals to follow perceived cultural, religious and/or family beliefs.
* **Children and young people looked after**- especially those who are cared for away from the area and those who go missing from their care placements.
* Young people at risk of **homelessness**- especially care leavers who are living in unsuitable, temporary or unstable accommodation, especially Bed and Breakfast.
* Young people who are **isolated** and estranged from their families and wider network of family and friends.

# Key Partners and Stakeholders to the Strategy

Children and young people are the most important partners and stakeholders to this strategy. This strategy also demonstrates the solid foundation of partnership working that exists in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly under ‘One Vision’ ([One Vision - Cornwall Council) and Our Safeguarding Children Partnership (https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/childrens-services/cornwall-and-isles-of-scilly-safeguarding-children-partnership/). This strategy has been developed through a multi-agency Task & Finish Group of Our Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP).](file://C:\\Users\\bdavies1\\AppData\\Local\\Microsoft\\Windows\\Temporary Internet Files\\Content.Outlook\\31RTQGW6\\One Vision - Cornwall Council) and Our Safeguarding Children Partnership (https:\\www.cornwall.gov.uk\\health-and-social-care\\childrens-services\\cornwall-and-isles-of-scilly-safeguarding-children-partnership\\.  This strategy has been developed through a multi-agency Task & Finish Group of Our Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP).)

The only way this strategy will reduce adolescent vulnerability is for the key partners and stakeholders to take full responsibility for the quality and impact of practice in their own areas and a full commitment to work together to identify and respond effectively to the identified risks.

Through the One Vision Executive Group and Our Safeguarding Children Partnership Board the following agencies and organisations are signed up to contributing to the successful implementation of this strategy:

* + ***Cornwall Council***
  + ***The Council for the Isles of Scilly***
  + ***Devon and Cornwall Constabulary***
  + ***NHS Kernow (Clinical Commissioning Group)***
  + ***Cornwall Partnership Foundation NHS Trust***
  + ***Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust***
  + ***Cornwall Association of Primary Heads***
  + ***Cornwall Association of Secondary Heads***
  + ***Colleges of Further and Higher Education in Cornwall***
  + ***NHS England – Devon and Cornwall Area Team***
  + ***Cornwall Housing Services***
  + ***Cornwall Community Safety Partnership***
  + ***Devon and Cornwall Probation Trust***
  + ***Youth Offending Service***
  + ***Careers South West***
  + ***A wide range of Voluntary and Community Sector Groups providing services to children, young people and families***

# Key Drivers

Whilst the overall ‘Good’ rating for Children and Family Services (CFS) in the OFSTED Single Inspection Framework April 2016 reflected positive outcomes for children, our response to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) was identified as ‘Requires Improvement to Get to Good’. As a result, the effectiveness of our response to CSE has been a focus for improvement for CFS and Our Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (OSCP) agencies. There has been an increasing awareness of the need to include consideration of children who are at risk of other forms of exploitation, including forms of exploitation through gang association. This is in response to an increasing awareness of the risks of children being exploited for criminal reasons, in particular the risk of involvement in ‘county lines’ and the recognized relationship in some cases between risk of CSE and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

Widening the scope for a strategy for vulnerable adolescents reflects the fact that young people often face multiple risks. Dealing with the response to certain threats in isolation can potentially hinder the understanding of vulnerabilities that frequently overlap and hence limit the effectiveness of intervention. There is a need for a proactive rather than reactive approach to exploitation; taking an early help approach to addressing the family circumstances,parenting and social issues that create vulnerability to young people later being targeted by exploiters and abusers, rather than focusing only on responding to incidents of exploitation after they have occurred. We are committed to seeing the child in the context of their lives not simply in the context of the current vulnerability or harm they have suffered or are exposed to.

If practitioners don’t have a clear understanding about context and the root causes of vulnerabilities (and where these arise), the effectiveness of interventions will be limited. Practitioners need to know what the problems are and who can be engaged to help and support the young people to enable them to have positive outcomes in their lives:

* Exploitation can happen to young people from all backgrounds. Whilst young women are the majority of victims, boys and young men are also exploited.
* Anxiety, shame and guilt are powerful barriers to young people seeking help.
* Support needs to be intensive and relationship-based if it is to act as a counterbalance to the ‘pull’ of abusers.
* Interventions are most effective where they build resilience by developingcritical thinking skills and improving young people’s confidence to resist peer pressure and make their own informed decisions.
* Encouraging young people to talk is critical – practitioners need to use ‘professional curiosity’, finding respectful ways to ask difficult questions.
* Victims are children, however they may first appear or present themselves. Many children who have experienced exploitation may not see themselves as victims. Where there have been failures in responding effectively to exploitation it is often because children were treated as if they were to blame for ‘putting themselves in risky situations’. Exploitation is never the victims fault, even if the dynamic of exchange means that on one level the child is ‘getting something they want’. It is important not to ignore the child’s vulnerability and the imbalance of power in relationships in which exploitation occurs.
* If exploited young people are also involved in criminal activity, they may be seen only as offenders rather than as victims of exploitation. Whilst the groomers, coercers and perpetrators of exploitation are usually adults, other children and young people of either gender can be exploitative. They can also be responsible for drawing other children into contact with perpetrators.
* Re-engaging with education, friends not linked to exploitation and family can help young people reconnect with essential ‘social anchors’.
* Intelligence sharing with police (including nicknames, addresses, ‘hot spots’, mobile numbers, taxi firms, car registrations etc.) can contribute to local disruption efforts.
* The fact that a young person is 16 or 17 years old and has reached the legal age of being able to consent to sex, should not be taken as a sign that they are no longer at risk of sexual exploitation. They can still suffer significant harm as a result of sexual exploitation and their right to support and protection from harm should not be ignored because they are over the age of 16.
* It can be difficult to strike the balance between promoting age-appropriate, developmentally understandable independence for young people and trying to manage and control aspects of that behavior that are increasing exposure to exploitation.

As young people get older, their experiences of abuse are often associated with public environments in which they spend their time. As such, a critical focus of this strategy will be on how young people can be better protected and supported by a wider range of individuals and bodies in a wider variety of contexts. This will include ensuring we enable adolescents to engage with these services when they need them.

Such public environments also include those in the virtual world too. In this respect, how young people are safeguarded in the context of their ‘access to technology and their use of social media’ is an underpinning concept to this strategy.

# Towards Safe Uncertainty

Adolescents needa different, developmentally appropriate response to safeguarding issues in comparison to younger children or adults. Taking risks is a developmentally appropriate part of adolescence; the focus must not be on eradicating risk, but on how we help young people become healthy, happy, independent adults. Effective practice with vulnerable adolescents is therefore a collaborative process, where practitioners are seen as part of the system along with the family and could therefore both influence young people and be influenced by them. Forming a therapeutic relationship with a young person can be seen as joining them “where they are at” in order to look forward with them to a preferred future from the same vantage point; this could help them share power and become more independent, in line with their developing competence andconfidence (self-efficacy).

There is a need for a responsive and tailored approach to individual young people; no one approach or intervention will work for every child and actions or interventions that reduce risk for one child may have an unintended and detrimental impact to increase the risks for another. It is particularly important to note that trying to make a young person do things they do not want to do, acting against their wishes and feelings and undermining their trust in professionals, may increase vulnerability and make them less safe, rather than more safe.

When working with adolescents we therefore need to move away from more rigid and controlling safeguarding strategies that may be more effective for younger children towards positions of 'safe uncertainty' (Mason, 2005). Mason proposed that both young people and practitioners could theoretically occupy one of four possible positions, both when experiencing problems and in the context of the helping relationships, arising from the combination of two different dimensions, safety and certainty. Safety can be understood as a sense of emotional or psychological containment (Vivian-Byrne, 2001); a belief that things can be managed with a bearable level of risk and anxiety to ourselves and to others. Safety can also be thought of in physical terms (e.g. managing the risk of physical harm to a child in cases of child abuse).

Young people coming into contact with help and protection services will generally be occupying a position of either unsafe certainty (feeling anxious or unhappy about their position and identifying something specific that has to change or be changed) or unsafe uncertainty (feeling anxious or unhappy about their position and not having a clear sense what to do about it). Mason proposed that the most therapeutically useful position for both the practitioners and young people to occupy is safe uncertainty, where people feel comfortable and contained enough to take the risk to make changes to their behaviour, even when it isn’t guaranteed whether this will be successful in achieving the changes desired.

Practitioners can help young people move towards safe uncertainty by being willing to experience uncertainty themselves by taking risks in forming relationships with young people (*relational risk taking*), thereby modelling this process for young people; also by adopting a stance of *authoritative doubt,* where practitioners both own and make available their own expertise and knowledge and recognise that this expertise can change and develop depending on our interactions with others (Mason, 2005).

Signs of Safety has been implemented as the core multiagency approach to working with families in Cornwall and managing risk where children are in need of help and protection. A strengths-based model like Signs of Safety accurately reflects our [Statement of Mission and Values](https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/13284349/Mission-and-Values.pdf) and our commitment to a more humanistic, graduated and proportionate approach to helping and protecting vulnerable adolescents.  It also fits with our commitment to a systems analysis of need and risks and to pro-social learning.

# A Unified Approach

Understanding the context in which children and young people live their lives is an essential feature of effective multi-agency intervention. This issue remains central to our overall approach; therefore, developing our understanding of the context of children’s lives and the vulnerabilities that can create pathways to greater harm will be central to everything we do.

To do this effectively, children and young people need to be seen, heard and helped:

* **Seen**- in the context of their lives at home, friendship circles, health, education and public spaces (including social media).
* **Heard**- to effectively protect children and young people, professionals need to take time to hear what children are saying and put themselves in the child or young person’s shoes to think about what their life might truly be like.
* **Helped**- by remaining professionally curious and by implementing effective and imaginative solutions that help children and young people.

The following strategic priorities, informed by local issues and self-assessment, provide the focus for further developing our safeguarding arrangements and responses to vulnerable adolescents. Action plans have been developed against these areas:

1. **Knowing our problem, knowing our response**

* The focus of this strategic priority is to ensure that all professionals and volunteers working in OSCP partnership, along with parents/carers, local businesses, residents, and young people themselves, know about the problems facing adolescents in the context of exploitation.
* They understand the signs and symptoms of exploitation and the factors that increase the risk to young people. Individuals know what to do if they are worried about a young person. Leaders and managers understand the local problem profile and contemporary intelligence picture and use this to target interventions to make young people safer.

1. **Strong leadership**

* The focus of this strategic priority is on the need for strong leadership to successfully tackle the range of risks facing adolescents in the 21st century.
* Leadership is required at all levels, but particularly from those at the top. Political leaders, Chief Executives and senior leaders in all organisations, together with leaders in the local community, have a responsibility to set the culture within which abuse and exploitation is not tolerated. Continuing to promote a culture that encourages professional curiosity, challenge and appropriate escalation of concerns is fundamental.
* Governance arrangements will ensure ongoing connectivity between policy areas impacting the welfare of adolescents.

1. **Prevention and early intervention**

* The focus of this priority is to ensure an unswerving focus on early intervention in order to prevent vulnerability escalating. In the context of exploitation, this priority relates to risk being effectively mitigated by partners both before a young person reaches adolescence and when they are in the adolescence stage itself.
* Strong early help systems, robust responses to domestic violence and the effective identification and tackling of neglect are key. Equally applicable is the work undertaken directly with children and young people, educating and empowering them to support their friends, build resilience to exploitation and better understand the risks that they might face (both offline and online).
* Practitioners should be aware of the key indicators of children being sexually exploited which can include:
* Going missing for periods of time or regularly coming home late.
* Regularly missing school or education or not taking part in education.
* Being in possession of unexplained gifts, mobile phone, etc.
* Being secretive about communication online.
* Associating with other young people involved in exploitation.
* Having older boyfriends and/or girlfriends.
* Contracting sexually transmitted infections.
* Mood swings or changes in emotional well-being.
* Drug and Alcohol misuse.
* Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour.

1. **Protection and support**

* This priority focuses on two key aspects - the basics and innovation. Whilst acknowledging the need to create new approaches to safeguarding, this cannot be done at the expense of basic practice.
* The focus on ‘the basics’ across CIOS includes reassurance that information is being shared appropriately, risks are being assessed comprehensively, the focus of work remains on the child or young person, escalation is understood and engaged as appropriate and case recording is contemporaneous and accurate.
* In terms of innovation, OSCP will seek out and engage in contemporary initiatives that enhance our opportunity to engage children and young people and empower them and the community that cares for them. This will include the use of cutting edge technology and closer alignment and partnership working with local children, parents, carers and community representatives.

1. **Disruption and prosecution**

* The focus of this priority is on ensuring a clear focus on the use of a range of disruption techniques to build the trust and confidence of victims. Through the implementation of such strategies, public confidence will increase, with individuals and communities empowered to report the signs of CSE and other forms of exploitation – knowing that robust and effective action will follow.
* It is not always clear-cut as to who is a victim and who is an offender; in some cases such as county lines, the offender may also be a vulnerable adolescent and potential victim of trafficking. This priority will seek to identify strategies for dealing with this dichotomy.
* This priority will focus on the targeting and pursuit of adult offenders and bring them to justice.

# The Top 10 Objectives

1. Make sure all vulnerable adolescents are supported to develop at least one trusted relationship with an adult who cares about them and their progress.
2. Strengthen the confidence of children and young people to speak up when they are worried and unhappy about what is happening in their lives through teaching them about healthy relationships, abuse and exploitation, and providing online advice and guidance.
3. Provide long term, intensive and relationship-based interventions and support to young people that build resilience by develop critical thinking skills and improving young people’s confidence to resist peer pressure and make their own informed decisions.
4. Raise the expertise of the universal workforce to understand which adolescents will be most vulnerable, how to recognise the signs and symptoms of exploitation and how to take appropriate action to prevent it.
5. Complete comprehensive multi-agency assessments: identify risks within families, schools, peer groups and public spaces. Specifically, ensure that extra-familial relationships and environments that impact upon adolescent’s safety are better understood.
6. Provide advice and support to families/carers, professionals and communities to reduce vulnerability and prevent exploitation by building resilience within our communities.
7. Enable agencies to identify victims and perpetrators of exploitation and locations of concern, in order to disrupt perpetrators and support victims. Strengthen the pursuit and prosecution of alleged perpetrators of exploitation through civil and criminal processes, including where children and young people do not perceive themselves as victims.
8. Sharing information in order to understand the nature and extent of child exploitation in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, as well as enabling the identification of patterns and intelligence gaps.
9. Strengthen commissioning arrangements to ensure that the service specifications of providers working with children and young people incorporate a duty to reduce vulnerability. Where appropriate, join up commissioning to prevent complexity, confusion and overlap in accessing the right help.
10. Ensure that all agencies are working together effectively to prevent, track and respond to children missing from home, care or education, including out of county placements.

# Key Success Measures

1. *Knowing our problem, knowing our response:*
   * Our problem profile is continually developing and understood in the context of young people, perpetrators and the spaces and places they frequent online and offline.
   * Professionals who come into contact with children and young people have relevant and proportionate knowledge of the broader profile of adolescent vulnerability. This includes the factors that exacerbate risk and the consequential vulnerabilities arising from exploitation.
   * Professionals, parents/carers, young people, local businesses and residents, can identify adolescent vulnerability, know who to contact and know what will be done in response. This is supported through robust awareness raising and regular training provided by OSCP, to partner agencies and communities.
   * Engaging, educating and empowering the broader community forms a critical element and this work will be directly supported and informed by a proposed OSCP Community Engagement Sub Group. We will encourage communities to be vocal about exploitation and the unacceptability of abuse. Communities participate in being part of the solution.
   * Analytical support is coordinated across a range of agencies to identify themes, patterns and trends relating to adolescent vulnerability. Stronger intelligence gathering and sharing across the partnership on individuals, peer groups and geographic hotspots engages a tactical response from the partnership to make young people safer. This intelligence should include information gathered from young people, their families and the wider community.
2. *Strong leadership*
   * The safety and wellbeing of vulnerable young people at risk of exploitation continues to be prioritised across all relevant organisations and community settings and this is evidenced in respective strategic planning.
   * The culture of organisations set by senior leaders and active engagement with young people, wins their trust. They are confident that their concerns are taken seriously and help is provided when needed. This culture helps drive a stronger response by peer groups in helping protect their friends and associates.
   * Partnership activity in Cornwall engages a broader range of organisations and individuals in the protection of vulnerable adolescents in extra-familial settings (i.e. schools, neighbourhoods, public, transport hubs, community centres or in areas where young people congregate). Leaders fully commit to engaging their staff in this work.
3. *Prevention and early intervention*

* The performance of early help systems across Cornwall reduces the need for statutory interventions – effectively dealing with need and vulnerability. Early help is subject to ongoing scrutiny by OSCP, testing the difference it is making to children and young people’s lives.
* Young people who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation (i.e. looked after children, missing children) are identified early and supported by their families/carers, professionals, and their community to prevent and build resilience against exploitation.
* Schools deliver high quality Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) and take a whole-school approach to gender equality, safeguarding, and preventing exploitation.
* Professionals are engaged in providing universal and targeted services to young people, empowering them to identify harmful behaviours and supporting young people to build positive and healthy attitudes towards relationships and friendships, gender identity, and sexuality.

1. *Protection and Support*

* Quality assurance processes by OSCP and partners provide reassurance that basic practice across all agencies is effectively safeguarding young people.
* Enduring support to children and young people who have been exploited is delivered, ensuring that what is offered is appropriate for each individual child or young person based on their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and the nature of the exploitation that they have experienced.
* OSCP develop their individual and collective expertise through joint learning exercises and strong partnership.

1. *Disruption and prosecution:*

* Professionals identify, assess and mitigate any vulnerabilities that might reduce the chances of young people exiting gang culture or involvement in youth crime and violence.
* Robust policing responses to perpetrators are in place: agreeing and monitoring investigation plans to run alongside support plans developed in response to a child sexual exploitation referral.
* All agencies effectively share information and routinely utilise intelligence-led disruption in relation to any local businesses, individuals or groups associated with exploitation
* Agencies are flexibly applying the full range of disruption tactics available through both criminal and civil routes to protect children and young people, including powers available in relation to licensing, health and safety, fraud, housing provision and other related legislation.
* Young people demonstrating harmful sexual behaviours are identified and support put in place to address their behaviours, with their own vulnerabilities and developmental stage being considered within any response.
* Robust offender management strategies post-conviction and/or effective intervention strategies that reduce the risk presented by identified abusers.

# Holding Agencies to Account

Our Safeguarding Children Partnership (OSCP) will hold single agencies to account for implementing the agree Action Plan across their services and workforce through the Quality Assurance and Performance subgroup, the Scrutiny Panel process and Section 11 audits. Leading up to **an initial** review of the strategy in **December** 2019, **it is proposed that OSCP should** hold a multi-agency Quality Assurance and Scrutiny Panel to assess progress in implementing the strategy.

# Governance and Consultation

The multi-agency Safeguarding Children Partnership acts as the strategic governance body for this strategy on an exception basis.

This strategy has been the subject of engagement with partners in key agencies and with children, young people and families. The development of the strategy has been supported by peer review as part of a programme of sector led improvement. Through consultation, this strategy has been endorsed by the following groups:

* Our Safeguarding Children Partnership
* The One Vision Executive Group
* The Safer Cornwall Partnership
* The Lead Member for the Children and Young People of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

# Evaluation and Review

The performance of agencies in achieving the objectives and success measures set out in the strategy will be reviewed by Our Safeguarding Children Partnership through monitoring the Action Plan and through the Quality Assurance & Scrutiny Panels. The contribution of partners will be reviewed additionally by the One Vision Executive Group. The strategy will be regularly reviewed by Our Safeguarding Children Partnership.

# The Action Plan

The following Action Plan sets out individual and single agency responsibilities and leadership for implementing the strategy at each level of prevention:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Knowing our problem, knowing our response** | | | | |
| **Objective** | **Action** | **Responsible person(s)** | **Timescale** | **Progress report** |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Strong leadership** | | | | |
| **Objective** | **Action** | **Responsible person(s)** | **Timescale** | **Progress report** |
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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Prevention and early intervention** | | | | |
| **Objective** | **Action** | **Responsible person(s)** | **Timescale** | **Progress report** |
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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Protection and support** | | | | |
| **Objective** | **Action** | **Responsible person(s)** | **Timescale** | **Progress report** |
| Ensure that agencies and commissioned services work together effectively and consistently to identify risk, prevent and disrupt the exploitation of children, young people and vulnerable adults up to the age of 25 years old, and to reduce the risks faced by those who go missing from home, care or education. | Review Missing and Child Exploitation arrangements | Ben Davies / Julie Saville | End May 2019 |  |
| Further improve the effectiveness of return to home interviews in developing an understanding of risk | Audit sample of RHIs | Julie Saville | End April 2019 |  |

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Disruption and prosecution** | | | | |
| **Objective** | **Action** | **Responsible person(s)** | **Timescale** | **Progress report** |
| Further improve the effectiveness of multi-agency action to disrupt and prevent exploitation through the Disruption Legal Planning Meeting protocol | Review Disruption Legal Planning Meeting activity and outcomes | Julie Saville / Jade Beland | End April 2019 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

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# Appendix 1

**Glossary of abbreviations**

C&FS Children & Family Services

CC Cornwall Council

CP Child Protection

CPFT Cornwall Partnership Foundation Trust

CSA Child Sexual Abuse

CYP Children and Young People

D&CC Devon & Cornwall Constabulary

D&CPT Devon & Cornwall Probation Trust

DCS Director for Children’s Services

DCSF Department for Children, Schools and Families

DCTS Disabled Children & Therapy Service

DfE Department for Education

ECSA Eradicating Child Sexual Abuse (a toolkit for practitioners)

EPS Education Psychology Service

GK Gweres Kernow (specialist service for CYP with HSB)

GTY Gweres tus Yownyk (children on the edge of care service)

HSB Harmful Sexual Behaviours

IoS Isles of Scilly

LADO Local Authority Designated Officer (professional allegations)

NHSE NHS England

NICE National Institute for Clinical Excellence

NSPCC National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

OCC Office of the Children’s Commissioner

OSCP Our Safeguarding Children Partnership (for Cornwall & IoS)

PHE Public Health England

PPU Police Protection Unit

RCHT Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust

SoS Signs of Safety

VCS Voluntary & Community Sector

# Appendix 2

Practice Quality Standard for working with Vulnerable Adolescents

This Practice Quality Standard should be considered alongside existing

Practice Quality Standards related to other aspects of work with

vulnerable adolescents, including (this list is not definitive):

Strategy discussions

Plans

Child Sexual Abuse

Return Home Interviews

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Standard** |
| 1. | Practitioners demonstrate they have read the research and undertaken training to better understand how to identify vulnerable adolescents and how to respond. |
| 2. | Practitioners can demonstrate they understand the barriers to children telling/showing anyone what is happening and who they are most likely to tell/show i.e. friends, mothers and teachers. |
| 3. | Practitioners recognise that presenting forms of harm such as physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect may indicate that young people face multiple risks. As a result practitioners do not respond to certain threats in isolation. |
| 4. | Practitioners consider adolescent vulnerability throughout the child protection processes of Strategy Discussion, section 47 enquiries, ICPC and child protection plans, even when other forms of harm are more apparent. |
| 5. | Practitioners feel empowered to challenge each other and use OSCP policy for resolving professional differences when they believe the multi-agency decision/response is inadequate to safeguard the child(ren). |
| 6. | Practitioners seek advice and guidance from specialists in order to consider all aspects of the harm experienced by vulnerable adolescents. |
| 7. | Practitioners have a good understanding of the treatment and therapy available to help children and parents overcome the trauma and how to access that help. |
| 8. | The child’s views and feelings, along with a sensitive understanding of their lived experience is foremost at all times in decision-making and planning. |