

Croydon Partnership 11-25 Exploitation Strategy

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CROYDON PARTNERSHIP 11-25 EXPLOITATION STRATEGY

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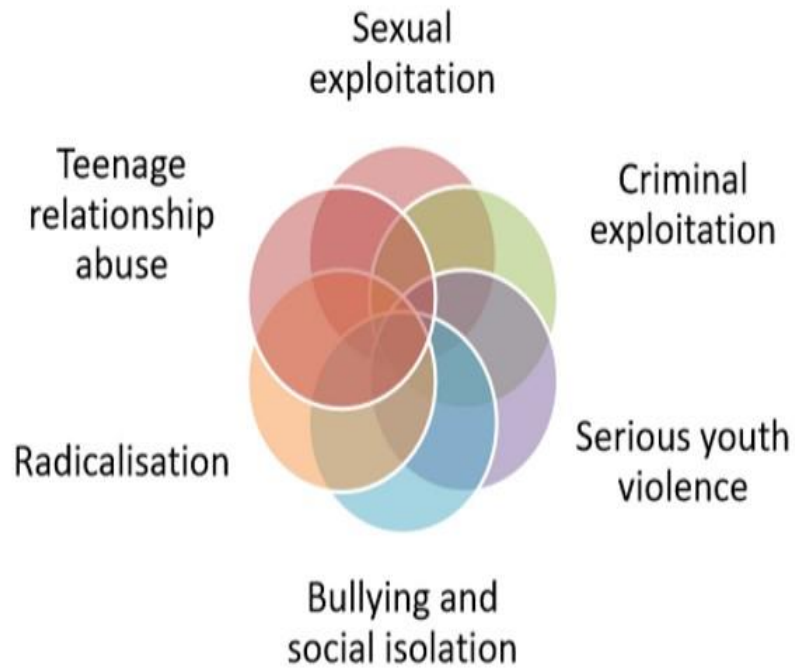
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CROYDON PARTNERSHIP 11-25 EXPLOITATION STRATEGY

1. Introduction

This strategy sets the partnership's aims and objectives for children and young adults aged 11-25 who are at risk of exploitation. It focuses on the relevant risks and issues facing those who are vulnerable to exploitation and outlines the priorities for the partnership describing how we will work with children, young people and families, the community, and multiagency partners to keep those who are vulnerable safe. The strategy has been collaboratively written by the 11-25 Strategic Partnership Board and reflects the shared commitment of all agencies.

Tackling exploitation is a complex task that requires a proactive, multi-agency, holistic approach. Understanding exploitation drivers, themes, risks, and places of concern will provide key prevention opportunities to stop children and young adults becoming victims of exploitation. The management, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators is also a key success factor in tackling exploitation. Perpetrators of exploitation will groom children and those vulnerable adults so that they are unaware they are being exploited. They will also use violence and coerce criminality through fear and provocation. It is vital that professionals work collaboratively to safeguard and collectively deploy tactics to disrupt perpetrators and the drivers of exploitation. Operationally, each form of exploitation will be categorised by its own definition however there are clear overlaps between different forms of exploitation and the associated risks. Risk is not siloed, and our response must consider the multiple domains of risk those being exploited experience. Those being exploited can be or perceived to be both victim and offender, and our collaborative response must be able to manage both aspects together at the same time whilst safeguarding the child or young adult. The below image produced by Bedfordshire University demonstrates the interconnected nature of all forms of exploitation.



Diaz, C 2020.

Research emphasises the need for a wider perspective and understanding of the context, situations and relationships in which exploitation can occur. The overarching message is that all children and young adults are vulnerable to exploitation, not just specific groups, particularly as the methodology used by perpetrators utilises online resources which has increased their potential reach. This also applies to perpetrators of exploitation; it is important not to make assumptions or bias about any specific groups who may be incorrectly profiled as more likely to commit such offences which leads to discrimination and lack of recognition of abuse in all communities. However, research and local data, also point to the increased vulnerability of children and young adults with adverse childhood experiences including exposure to parental substance misuse, housing instability, offending, violence, and neglect at home. These children and young adults are more likely to have experienced exclusions from school, experience of the criminal justice system and are more likely to have social, emotional, and mental health needs, factors which can increase the risk of being vulnerable to exploitation.

Many of the existing safeguarding services and structures were designed to address familial risk, while young people's needs and experiences outside of their homes may be very different. As children mature, risk may also come from their own behaviours and that of their peers as well as schools, neighbourhoods, and the wider environment. We also know that the transition to adulthood is a particularly challenging and vulnerable time and that needs do not end when a young person turns eighteen. An awareness and response from a wide range of partners addressing these different contexts and issues is required when working to safeguard adolescents and young adults vulnerable to exploitation. Additionally, we need to ensure that we promote

resilience; our role is not only to protect, but also to prepare young people for adulthood.

This strategy provides the foundation to describe how we want to work and defines our roadmap to strengthening the identification, assessment, and intervention for this cohort of children and young adults, and has been informed by:

- Access published safeguarding adult reviews (SARs) via [Safeguarding Adult Reviews - Croydon SAB](#)
- Access published Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) via [Why do we carry out Domestic Homicide Reviews? | Croydon Council](#) ▪ Access published Local safeguarding practice reviews via <https://www.croydonlcsb.org.uk/reviews-and-briefings> ▪ Croydon Vulnerable Adolescent Review (2019)
- Croydon Community Safety Strategy (2022-24)
- Croydon Youth Justice Plan (2021)
- Child Exploitation Pan London Operating Protocol (2021)
- Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking, and modern slavery: an addendum (Ofsted, 2018),
- ‘Time to listen’ – a joined up response to child sexual exploitation and missing children’ (Ofsted, 2016),
- ‘It was hard to escape’ - safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation (Child National Safeguarding Review Panel, 2020).
- Information and intelligence provided by multi-agency partners, case audits and reviews, the community, children, young people, and families.
- ‘Keeping kids safe,’ Childrens Commissioner, February 2019
- Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extrafamilial harm, Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme 2023.

At a whole system level, we seek to be both evidence informed and participative, bringing together the contextual, transitional, and relational, aiming to understand and respond to the interacting factors.

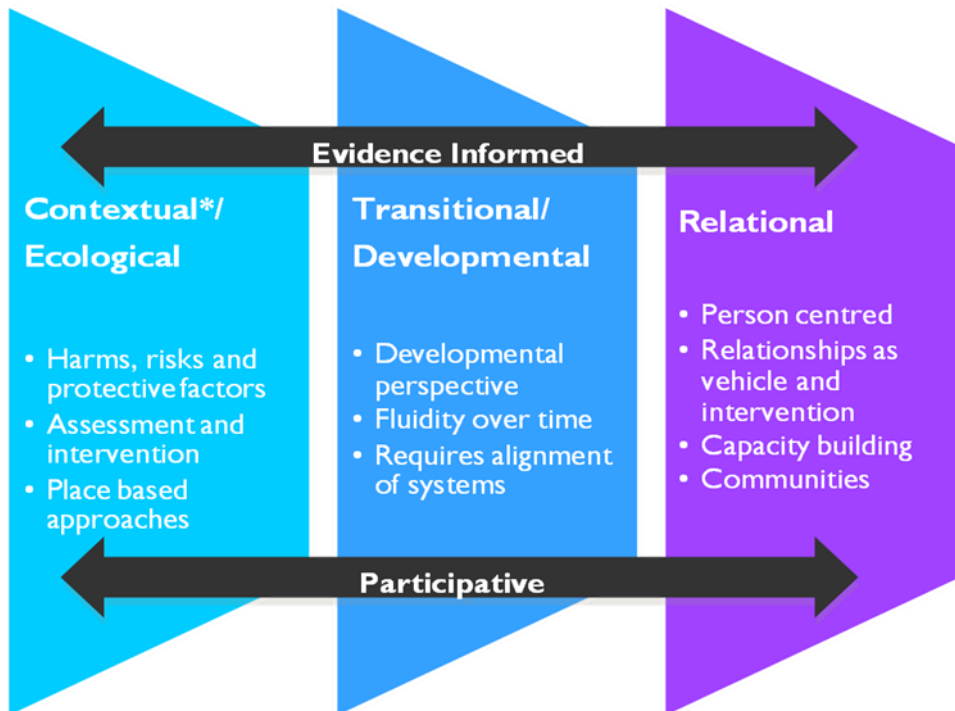


Diagram and concept taken from “Research informed practice with adolescents,” Dez Holmes, Research in Practice 2019. * See <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk>

This strategy is also informed by the recent work of the Tackling Child Exploitation programme and the multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. Our work is underpinned by these practice principles:



Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm, HM Government 2023.

This is intended to be a dynamic document that will evolve as we work more closely with all partners and develop a deepened understanding. We are keen to see the impact of this strategy and will take a phased approach to ensure that the actions to be delivered from the priorities are realistic and achievable.

2. Our Vision and purpose

Vision

Our partnership vision for 11 – 25-year-olds in Croydon is that:

'All children, young people and adults in Croydon will be safe, healthy, and happy, and will aspire to be the best they can be. The future is theirs.'

To achieve our vision we are committed to ensure:

- For families to be able to care for their children where safe to do so.
- Partnership should work to make sure that children, young people, and young adults receive the right help at the right time.
- Resources should be targeted to increase prevention of harm at the earliest point to reduce risk related to exploitation.
- Empowering communities to be involved and informed to deliver change.
- Working collaboratively in identifying and managing risks for children, young people, and young adults.
- Working alongside children, young people, and their families to achieve positive and lasting change.
- Giving our children and young people looked after the best opportunities to maintain family links and support them to achieve successful, independent lives as adults.
- Support young people transitioning into adulthood through the development of joined up services.

Purpose

This strategy particularly focuses on the way the partnership will work together to address the issues and improve the outcomes for those children and young adults vulnerable to or experiencing exploitation. We are keen to ensure that we encompass those young adults where we know there can be gaps and where transitions between adults and children's services in each partner agency can cause fragmentation or loss of services.

The partnership is aware that exploitation is complex and can often coincide with other vulnerabilities, needs and risks. The scope of this Strategy crosses the domains of child sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, transitional safeguarding, missing children, gangs, and serious youth violence. Some of these areas will have separate strategies and protocols and this strategy should be read in conjunction with these. Of relevance but not exhaustive are the following:

- Pan London child exploitation Protocol 2021
- Youth Safety Delivery Plan (in development for Sep 23)
- Early Help Strategy and Delivery Plan (in development)
- Transitional safeguarding protocol (in development)
- Croydon Community Safety Strategy (2022-2024)
- Croydon Youth Justice Plan (2021)
- SEND Strategy (2023-2026)
- Croydon's Health and Care Plan and prevention framework (SWL CCG)
- Croydon Council Adult Social Care & Health Strategy (2022 to 2025)

- Other relevant guidance and policies both national and local in the following areas:
 - *Children missing care and education, Violence Against Women & Girls, Mental Health including suicide and self-harm, Substance misuse, Radicalisation, Trafficking and Modern Slavery, Housing & Youth Homelessness, Corporate Parenting, Early Years, Adult Safeguarding.*

We are aware that there will be a group of young people aged 18-25 who will be entitled to support through the Children and Families Act (2014) and the Care Act (2014). Both legislative frameworks have the same emphasis on outcomes, personalisation, and integration of services. Adherence to the Human Rights Act (1998) will also ensure fair, dignified, and respectful service delivery.

Underpinning our working together will be a range of theoretical approaches and ways of working; of particular relevance to this strategy is Contextual Safeguarding.

Contextual safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families, it is also referred to as ‘extra familial harm.’ It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people’s experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent child relationships (Firmin, 2017)¹. Working Together (2018)² calls for frontline agencies to consider contextual safeguarding, i.e., the vulnerability to risk and abuse faced by adolescents in a range of social contexts outside of the family setting. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems and our wider safeguarding partnerships in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse beyond their family.

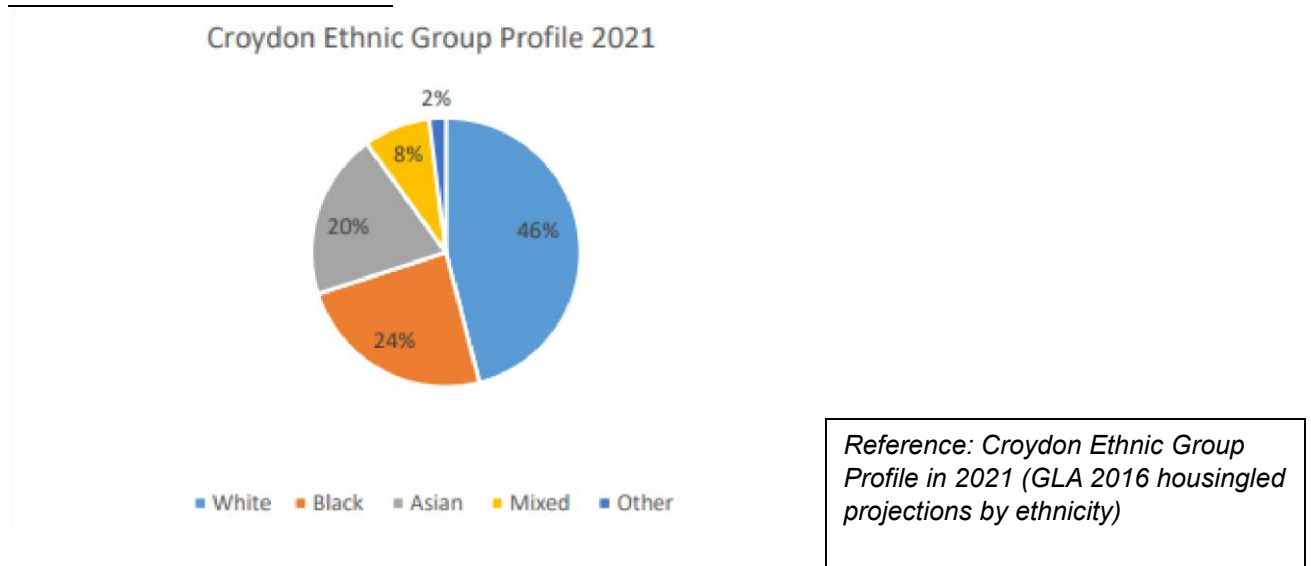
3. Croydon Context

Croydon is one of London’s largest boroughs, with 390,000 residents, a vibrant, urban town centre at its heart and a network of district centres each with their own unique identity. Croydon has the highest number of residents aged 0 to 19 years of age (Estimate ONS 2020), and the highest number of looked after children in the capital. Croydon’s greatest strength is its people, our residents are caring, compassionate and principled; we have a committed voluntary sector and strong partnerships.

¹ <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>

² HM Government (2018). *Working Together to Safeguard Children A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.*

Croydon ranks as the 17th least deprived out of the 33 London boroughs. However, these averages hide the pockets of high deprivation within Croydon. One small area of Croydon is the third most deprived area in London. Croydon is a diverse community;



Most adult victims of crime are aged between 18 and 45. Large percentages of victims of specific crimes, especially domestic violence (DV), are in this age-group. However, those aged 10 to 17 years old experience almost one fifth of all crime harm; this is closely associated with knife crime. (Strategic needs assessment Community Safety Strategy 2022-24).

The Community Safety Partnership’s approach is summarised as: ‘most crime, specifically crime harm, is committed by a small fraction of offenders against a small fraction of victims in a small fraction of locations. The Partnership will refocus its limited resources on high priority victims and hotspots, to increase the chance of crime reduction, particularly concerning those targets which give rise to serious harm.’

As a result of concerns regarding the number of young people coming to significant harm in Croydon (including 5 deaths in 2017) a vulnerable adolescent thematic review was commissioned and published in 2019. (Croydon Safeguarding Children’s Board; 2019) There was some key themes and recommendations identified which are relevant to the vulnerability for the children and young adults this strategy is focusing on. The key findings were:

1. Early help and prevention are critical.
2. Greater recognition of, and response to, children’s emotional health and wellbeing is needed.
3. An integrated, whole systems approach is needed across agencies, communities, and families.
4. Schools should be at the heart of multi-agency intervention.

5. Disproportionality, linked to ethnicity, gender and deprivation, requires attention and action.

The recommendations have already been taken forward, but this learning has been integral in informing this strategy and the areas we need to focus upon.

4. Our Priorities

Based on our understanding of the issues in Croydon we have agreed the following priorities and goals to achieve our overarching vision to keep vulnerable adolescents and young adults safe from harm.

- ❖ **Early Identification-** Professionals and communities will be able to identify exploitation at the earliest opportunity.
- ❖ **Early Intervention and Support-** Access to early help and early intervention services will be provided to divert children and young adults from exploitation and risk of harm.
- ❖ **Engaging and involving Children, Young People, Families, and Community-** Services and our interventions will reflect the needs and wishes of our young people. Those in our communities will be actively involved in planning, decision making and service development.
- ❖ **Addressing Disproportionality-with a focus on racism:** Local partners and agencies develop a comprehensive understanding of the contextual risk factors and social inequalities that those from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic backgrounds experience and work effectively and purposefully to tackle disadvantage and structural racism.
- ❖ **Promote Multiagency Strategic and Whole System Working-** all partners will contribute to our collective understanding of need and contextual risks so that we can target our resources in the most effective way, be innovative, and the safety of children and adults is prioritised.
- ❖ **Strengthen Practice and Oversight Framework-** We have strategic confidence in our interventions and assurance systems in place that ensure they are working and making a difference to children and young adult's safety and quality of life. We learn from local and national practice reviews and from the experiences and views of young people to improve our understanding and support to vulnerable adolescents and young adults.

5. How we aim to achieve our priorities:

5.1 Early Identification.

AIM: To ensure professionals and communities will be able to identify exploitation at the earliest opportunity and be confident in accessing support.

WHAT WE WILL DO AND SEE TO ACHIEVE THIS:

- Awareness raising campaigns on exploitation aimed at supporting parents, communities, and professionals to identify signs of vulnerability and know what they should do and where to get help.
- Increase awareness for children about exploitation and encourage confidence in the agencies that may be able to help them and their peers. Increase life skills such as conflict resolution, anger management, staying safe and being resilient through provision of talks, workshops, dramas and PSHE and online safety teaching.
- Build strong working relationships and effective communication with the wider community, faith groups, voluntary sector, and local businesses to understand what goes on in the community, the hotspots, and the impact of campaigns and support.
- The partnership will work together with the community to ensure that the context of young people outside the home and school including parks, shopping centres, transport hubs, fast food outlets, estates and other public and community spaces are safe for them.
- Multi-agency training offer will be developed for the community and community organisations to understand contextual and extra-familial risks, their early indicators, modus operandi (including technology and social media platforms, and their interface with extra-familial harm), and consequences for children, young people, families, and the community.
- Ensure that multiagency information and intelligence is gathered and connected through various workstreams. This is shared promptly to identify early those children and young people at the greatest risk of exploitation and extra-familial harm. Individual, peer group, community level indicators will be used to identify risks and vulnerabilities in groups, communities, and individuals as they relate to exploitation of children and young people.
- Increase awareness of particular risks across communities for those who may have additional needs that may increase their vulnerability and make accessing support harder such as those with special educational needs, disabilities, substance misuse or mental health.

5.2 Early Intervention and Support.

AIM: Access to early help and early intervention services is provided to divert children and young adults from exploitation and risk of harm.

WHAT WE WILL DO AND SEE TO ACHIEVE THIS:

- Review our partnership early help offer and put in place a rounded and inclusive offer that responds to all concerns about children and families that will help us to intervene early to reduce adverse childhood experiences and divert children and young people from exploitation and risk of harm.

- Young people who are potential victims of exploitation will be identified early through multiagency information and intelligence sharing and provided the needed support and engagement in positive activities that will reduce their vulnerabilities and increase their resilience.
- Ensure that referral processes are understood for both children and adults safeguarding and that indicators of exploitation are recognised as potential harm that may require additional support and protection. For children that this is detailed clearly within the Childrens safeguarding partnership Threshold Document and that the adult safeguarding referral pathway is fully utilised.
- Increase our understanding about the use of technology, including but not exclusive to, Instagram, Snap Chat, Tik Tok, You Tube and recognition of their use as potential platforms from which exploitation can occur and can also present opportunities to understand the early indicators of local issues and tensions.

5.3. Engaging and Involving Children, Young People, Families, and Community

AIM: Services and our interventions will reflect the needs and wishes of our young people. Those in our communities will be actively involved in planning, decision making and service development.

WHAT WE WILL DO AND SEE TO ACHIEVE THIS:

- We will create and connect with existing opportunities to listen to the views, wishes, and lived experiences of all in our community to better understand their feelings, hopes, fears and aspirations and will take these into account when making decisions about future service developments.
- When working with children and young adults we will meet and interact with them in their community and environment; so that we can understand the contexts in which they live and build the strengths within their community.
- We engage families to understand their experiences and the issues that affect their ability to safely care for their children and support them to recognise the early warning signs of community risks, access support and improve their confidence in keeping their children and young adults safe.
- Regular use of community engagement and participation activities which enhance our understanding of the community perspective on risks and effectiveness of our support and interventions as well as assuring families and communities.

- We will seek to incorporate opportunities for those with lived experience to inform future multiagency practice and support, learning from positive outcomes as well as incidents where learning is identified.

5.4 Addressing Disproportionality

Disproportionality occurs when groups with particular characteristics are over or under-represented in services, compared to the number of people in that group in the general population. We recognise that we have a disproportionate high number of children and young people from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic backgrounds in our vulnerable adolescent, school exclusion and youth offending cohorts.

Our focus will therefore be upon:

AIM: Local partners and agencies develop a comprehensive understanding of the contextual risk factors and social inequalities that those from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic backgrounds experience and work effectively and purposefully to tackle disadvantage and structural racism.

We also aim to increase our understanding of the impact and intersectionality of other forms of disproportionality and discrimination particularly, sex, gender, sexuality, and neurodiversity.

WHAT WE WILL DO AND SEE TO ACHIEVE THIS:

- Increase our understanding of the reasons for disparity and what needs to be done to bring about an improvement. This includes using intelligence systems with multi-partner input to fully understand the local factors, needs, ethnicity, and other characteristics that highlight issues of disproportionality and any underpinning factors.
- Children and young people from Black and Asian minority ethnic backgrounds at risk of school exclusion and with additional vulnerabilities to receive targeted support aimed at keeping them in education, access positive activities and build trusted relationships.
- The partnership will seek to actively engage Black and Asian minority ethnic communities and the voluntary, faith and community providers supporting them in the community in addressing and solving the problems identified.

- Agencies have effective and accessible measures in place to challenge discriminatory practices.
- Training is available for all agencies to promote cultural competence in the development of policy, practice and engagement with children, young people, and families from Black and Asian Minority Ethnic backgrounds and other relevant representative groups.

5.5 Promote Multiagency Strategic and Whole System Working

AIM: All partners will contribute to our collective understanding of need and contextual risks so that we can target our resources in the most effective way, be innovative, and the safety of children and adults is prioritised.

We recognise that keeping children and young people safe is the responsibility of all partners (including political, business and community leaders) and agencies in Croydon and this should be reflected in respective strategic plans.

WHAT WE WILL DO AND SEE TO ACHIEVE THIS:

- All partners commit to working together and proactively seeking opportunities to avoid silo working both across the statutory sector and within communities, recognising that they can influence the activity to improve the outcomes for individual children, communities, and places.
- Multi-agency information and intelligence is gathered and shared to identify children and young people who are vulnerable to exploitation, to map hotspots, trends and risks in missing episodes, victim and perpetrator identification, and criminal activity involving children.
- Themes and patterns generated from the individual and community level data will be used to provide strategic intelligence to senior leaders and managers to get a higher-level picture of exploitation in the community and make decisions about local priorities and use resources to tackle exploitation.
- Senior leaders who attend the strategic partnership board will ensure that they consider the interrelationship with this strategy and objectives from other boards or their own agency intentions to ensure that there is a coordinated approach.
- A focus will be placed on increasing our understanding of the needs of young people as they transition to adulthood and the gaps in services that are in place to provide support.

- Effective multiagency work through timely information sharing and analysis will help us to better understand the local problem profile, identify those who exploit vulnerable adolescents and disrupt their activities using relevant legislation including modern slavery, licencing, health, and safety; community safety initiatives; and other tactics.

5.6 Strengthen Practice and Oversight Framework

AIM: We have strategic confidence in our interventions and assurance systems in place that ensure they are working and making a difference to children and young adult's safety and quality of life. We learn from local and national practice reviews and from the experiences and views of young people to improve our understanding and support to vulnerable adolescents.

- We will review the operational oversight and support provided and ensure a clear practice framework. The Complex Adolescent Panel (CAP) is the current multiagency operational leadership group that meets weekly to review individual cases of children (up to 18years) identified as vulnerable to extrafamilial risks, it's role is to share information and ensure appropriate responses to keep young people safe. The CAP will be enlarged to include all key multiagency, community and voluntary sector partners. There will be a new transitional safeguarding panel which will focus on 17–25-year-olds at risk of exploitation and extra familial harm.
- The panels will ensure multiagency perspectives to assessment, planning and support and provide multiagency commitment, scrutiny, and an additional level of oversight to practice.
- We will review our partnership assessment and planning framework for adolescents and those young adults experiencing exploitation to one that recognises the critical importance of contextual and individual factors.
- Operational managers from across the partnership will understand the context practitioners operate under and the resources available to them. Bringing together various assessments and triangulating professional perspectives enables timely and proactive responses and promotes shared understanding, ownership, and a single approach to working with the young people, promoting trusting relationships.
- There will be a focus on the disruption activity for those perpetrators exploiting children and young adults, scrutiny of the NRM process and the subsequent modern slavery investigations.

- Escalation processes will be clear when risks, complexity or barriers to service interventions are highlighted through CAP and the transitional safeguarding board.
- The Panels will evaluate and report the impact of interventions, themes, and trends to the appropriate strategic boards, highlighting strengths in practice as well as areas for improvement.
- There will be an agreed audit process that gives the board assurance that multiagency plans are in place that target the assessed needs, risks and vulnerabilities and disrupt harm.
- Training will be provided by the partnerships for staff of all agencies on how to identify and respond to exploitation; supported by policy, procedure, multiagency guidance, and joint working protocols to ensure that all professionals working with adolescents have access to expert advice and consultation.

6 Delivering the Strategy – Achieving the Priorities.

A detailed action plan that sets out actions and success milestones against the strategic priorities will be developed to make this strategy a living document. The 11 – 25 Strategic Partnership Board will drive the achievement of the priorities of this strategy and review their impact. The board has representation from strategic leaders from key agencies across Croydon as detailed in the Terms of Reference in the appendix. The board will report annually to the Children’s Safeguarding Children’s Partnership (CSCP) and the Croydon Safeguarding Adults Board (CSAB) with appropriate links made to other relevant partnership boards.

An operational group will be developed with operational leads from all partners and with the remit of implementing the action plan for this strategy. The operational group will report on progress to the multiagency 11-25 Strategic Partnership Board

7 Glossary

11–25-year-olds are vulnerable to different types of exploitation and extra-familial harm, often from multiple sources and severity. Some of the common exploitative activities and sources confronting adolescents currently includes the following:

Criminal exploitation

Child criminal exploitation 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 technology. Criminal exploitation of children is broader than just county lines and includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft (UK Home Office)³. Criminal exploitation is child abuse where children and young people are manipulated and coerced into committing crimes. Adults can use different tactics to recruit and exploit children and young people, including bribing them with rewards, befriending them, and threatening them, or coercing them.

County lines

County lines is a major, cross-cutting issue involving drugs, violence, gangs, safeguarding, criminal and sexual exploitation, modern slavery, and missing persons. The UK Government defines county lines as “a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more

importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of “deal line.” They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. County lines activity and the associated violence, drug dealing, and exploitation has a devastating impact on young people, vulnerable adults, and local communities (UK Home Office).

Serious Youth Violence

Youth violence include offences of robbery, actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, attempted murder, and murder where the victim is aged 10-24 years and the offence is not flagged as domestic abuse. Youth violence may involve the use of knives or weapons, and may be linked to groups, gangs, or other criminality such as drug dealing. Serious youth violence is defined in the same way but excludes robbery and actual bodily harm. The Youth Justice Board defines it as ‘any drug, robbery or violence against the person offence that has a gravity score of five or more’ and the Metropolitan Police Service defines it as ‘any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim is aged 1-19.’

Radicalisation and extremism

Radicalisation is the process through which a person comes to support or be involved in extremist ideologies. It can result in a person becoming drawn into terrorism and is in itself a form of harm. Extremism is 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. It includes calls for the death of members of the British armed forces (HM Government, 2011)⁴. Local authorities and partner authorities are required to have “due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism” in the exercise of their functions.

³ *Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance (2018); Serious Violence Strategy (2018)*

⁴ HM Government (2011). *Prevent strategy*.

Gangs

Gangs are groups of children, adolescents and young adults who share a common identity and are involved in wrongful or delinquent activities. Gangs can include people of every gender, race, culture, and socioeconomic group. Some children and adolescents are motivated to join a gang for a sense of connection or to define a new sense of who they are. Others are motivated by peer pressure, a need to protect themselves and their family, because a family member also is in a gang, or to make money. (American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry)⁵. They engage in criminal activity and violence; lay claim over territory (not necessarily geographical but can include an illegal economy territory); have some form of identifying structural feature; and are in conflict with other, similar, gangs.

Child sexual exploitation

Child sexual exploitation is a type of sexual abuse. When a child or young person is exploited, they are given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status, and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities. Working Together (2018) defines child sexual exploitation as “a form of child sexual abuse that 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.”

Modern slavery

Modern slavery captures a whole range of types of exploitation, many of which occur together. These include but are not limited to sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, domestic servitude, forced labour, organ removal, forced begging, forced benefit fraud, forced marriage and illegal adoption. Any consent victims have given to their treatment will be irrelevant where they have been coerced, deceived, or provided with payment or benefit to achieve that consent. Children (those aged under 18) are considered victims of trafficking, whether or not they have been coerced, deceived, or paid to secure their compliance. They need only have been recruited, transported, received, or harboured for the purpose of exploitation.

Relevant Practice Approaches in Croydon

Systemic Practice

The Local Authority uses a systemic practice framework which is a comprehensive theoretical and research-based approach for social workers and practitioners working with the 11- to 25-year-olds. The aim of the model is to provide staff with a framework to draw from to inform their practice. Systemic practice will be our overarching

⁵ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2016). *Gangs and Children*. Facts for Families, 98, September 2016

foundation, alongside a number of relationship-based techniques. This includes contextual safeguarding, restorative practice, trauma informed practice, trusted relationships, transitional safeguarding. Systemic practice will enable practitioners to understand that children and families are in contextual relationships that shape their identity. The Partnership has a systemically based culture that privileges relationships as a conduit to create change. The partnership understands that systemic social work supports our belief that we are all complex beings and there are multiple perspectives. We believe that families have existing strengths and resources, using our expertise in a manner that is not oppressive. We also consider how wider contextual factors can influence family functioning.

Contextual Safeguarding

Contextual safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families, it is also referred to as 'extra familial harm.' It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. Parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent child relationships (Firmin, 2017)⁶. Working Together (2018)⁷ calls for frontline agencies to consider contextual safeguarding, i.e., the vulnerability to risk and abuse faced by adolescents in a range

of social contexts outside of the family setting. Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse beyond their family.

Trusted Relationships

There is strong evidence that a positive practitioner–child relationship is associated with positive child outcomes (Shirk & Karver, 2003)⁸. Trusted relationships between practitioners and children and young people are not the only source of social support, it may also be provided through peers, and family members. The absence of trusted relationships is consistently cited in reviews of failures around child exploitation. Trusted relationship between practitioners and vulnerable children and young people is important because children vulnerable to exploitation are less likely to trust adults, relationships between practitioners and vulnerable children are often changing and short-term, building trust is key to engaging and maintaining relationships with vulnerable children, the presence of a trusted relationship is a key facilitator of disclosures of abuse or exploitation. The partnership recognises that building a relationship of trust is the most important factor in disclosure, protection and

⁶ <https://contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>

⁷ HM Government (2018). *Working Together to Safeguard Children A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.*

⁸ Shirk, S. R., & Karver, M. (2003). *Prediction of treatment outcome from relationship variables in child and adolescent therapy: A meta-analytic review.* *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 71(3) ⁹
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/trauma-informed-practice-toolkit-scotland>

intervention for vulnerable children and young people, and use 'critical moments' as opportunities to intervene and provide support.

Trauma Informed Practice

Trauma-informed practice is grounded in and directed by a complete understanding of how trauma exposure affects children and young people's development and functioning. It is informed by neuroscience, psychology, and social science as well as attachment and trauma theories, and gives a central role to the complex and pervasive impact trauma has on a person's world view and relationships⁹. The Partnership recognises that people have had traumatic experiences, and as a result may find it difficult to feel safe within services and to develop trusting relationships with professionals and agencies. Therefore, we organise and work with children, young people and families in ways that promote safety and trust. This helps us to understand the underlying causes of presenting behaviours and put in place the right support that minimises risks and prompt good outcomes for children and young people.

Restorative Practice

Restorative practice offers a language and a way of being that promotes the importance of relationships and supports the nurturing of them. Restorative practice embraces behaviours, interactions and approaches which seek to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships and resolve challenges where there has been conflict. The approach covers formal and informal processes that enable effective communication. The aim is to remove barriers and inspire a sense of community, understanding, shared responsibility and accountability. There are different restorative approaches, and these range from formal to informal processes. No matter what approach is taken, all focus on removing barriers and encouraging a sense of community. Understanding and strengthening relationships with children, young people and families can empower them to share responsibility and bring about positive

change in their own lives. The partnership believes that work with children, young people, families, and partner agencies work best when done in the context of relationships, work with people, and not doing things to them or for them.

Transitional Safeguarding

Transitional safeguarding' challenges us to think about how we safeguard adolescents as they move into adulthood (Research in Practice)⁹ to move away from the binary norm of child versus adult safeguarding. It recognises that the experience of adversity in childhood can make some adolescents vulnerable to harm and that the effects of such harm can persist into adulthood. It is an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adult safeguarding practice, and prepares young people for their adult lives. It focuses on safeguarding young people from adolescence into adulthood, recognising transition is a journey not an event, and

⁹ <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/news-views/2018/august/transitional-safeguarding-fromadolescence-to-adulthood/>

every young person will experience this journey differently¹⁰. Research shows that unresolved trauma can increase risks later in adulthood, and we know that not responding to harms in early adulthood can mean that people have more difficult and painful lives, and may need more expensive support later.

8 Appendix

Terms of reference for Croydon 11 – 15 Exploitation Strategic Partnership Board

¹⁰ *Bridging the gap transitional safeguarding and the role of social work with adults, 2021.*
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bridging-the-gap-transitional-safeguarding-and-the-role-of-social-work-with-adults>