

Meeting Title	Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee
Report Title	Report on Child Exploitation in Nottingham City
Meeting Date	30 th March 2023

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<p>Summary of issues:</p> <p>This report provides information on key activity in relation to child exploitation and missing children in Nottingham City. The report demonstrates how we ensure that children who go missing from home and are at risk of exploitation are identified, safeguarding and supported.</p> <p>Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 specifically identifies the following risks under the term contextual safeguarding and acknowledges that children may be vulnerable to multiple threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as County Lines • Trafficking • Online abuse • Sexual exploitation • Extremism leading to radicalisation <p>Recommendation(s):</p> <p>1. This report is for information, discussion and challenge.</p>

1. Background

- 1.1 Exploitation is a form of abuse. Child exploitation occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person into an activity that results in financial or other advantage for the perpetrator or facilitator.
- 1.2 Specific types of exploitation include:
 - Modern slavery (including human trafficking)
 - Sexual Exploitation
 - Criminal Exploitation
 - Financial Exploitation

- 1.3 Multiple types of exploitation can occur alongside one another or as part of other forms of abuse.
- 1.4 The national strategy, Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy 2021, defines Child Sexual Exploitation: forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving violence, or whether the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, and may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse.
- 1.5 Home Office guidance defines Child Criminal Exploitation as: where an individual or group coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 to take part in criminal activities, including but not exclusively County Lines. 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.
- 1.6 The national strategy has three Objectives:
 - Tackling all forms of child sexual abuse and bringing offenders to justice
 - Preventing offending and re-offending
 - Protecting and safeguarding children and young people and supporting all victims and survivors.

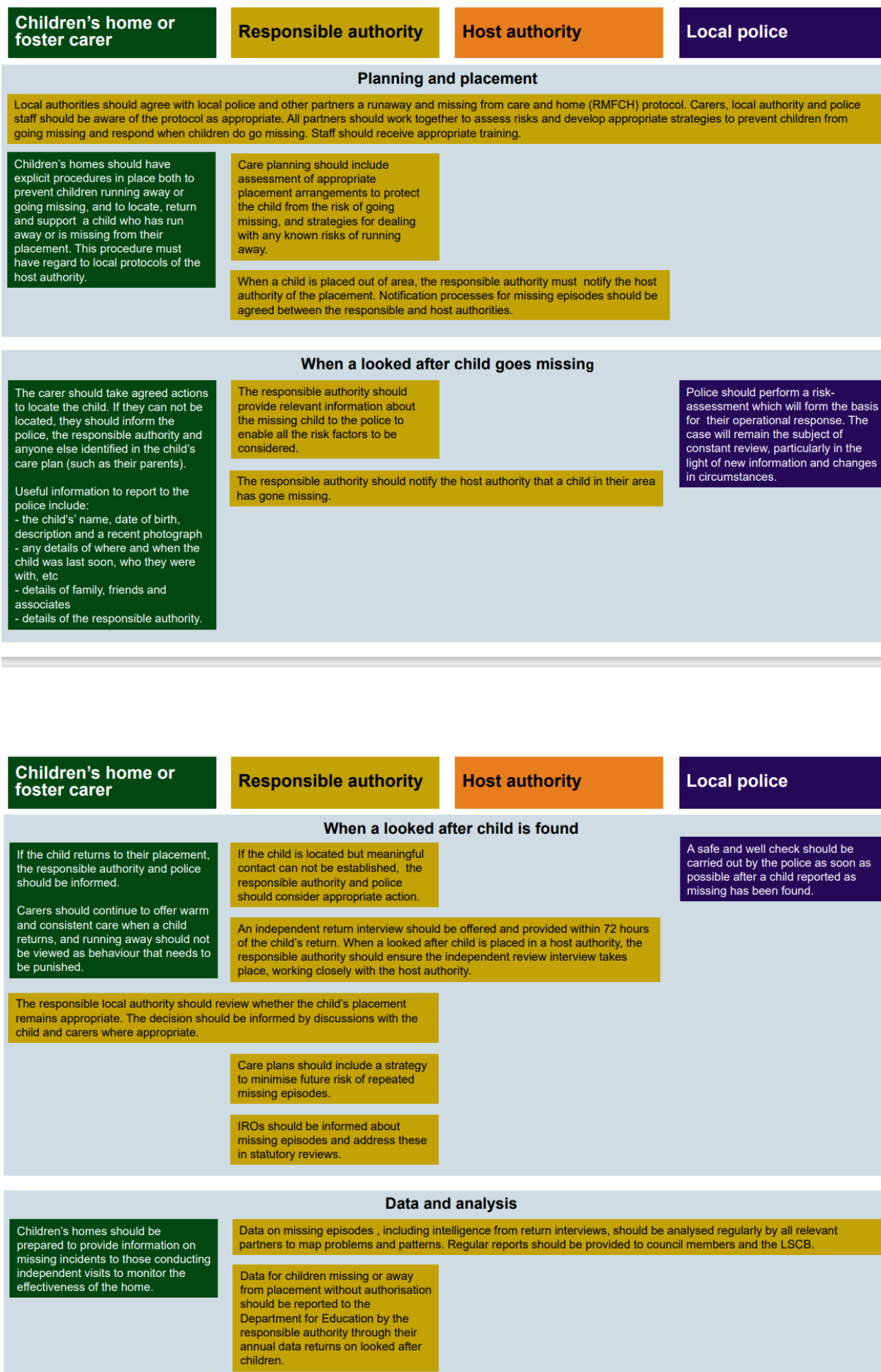
2. Key Issues:

- 2.1 This report provides information on key activity in relation to child exploitation and missing children in Nottingham City. The report demonstrates how we ensure that children who go missing from home and are at risk of exploitation are identified, safeguarded, and supported.

3. Missing from Home

- 3.1 Children who go missing, particularly those who repeatedly go missing from home or care can be more vulnerable and at risk of forms of exploitation. The statutory guidance which underpins the responsibilities of local authorities is set out by the Department for Education and specifically outlines additional responsibilities in relation to Looked after Children (children in care) in the event that they are missing [Statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781212/Statutory-guidance-on-children-who-run-away-or-go-missing-from-home-or-care.pdf)
- 3.2 The flow chart on the next page sets out the responsibilities in respect of children who are missing from care as per the statutory guidance:

The following chart shows the main steps that need to be taken when a child goes missing from local authority care, and where responsibility lies for those steps. It should be read alongside the full statutory guidance on children who run away or go missing from home or care, and is not intended to be a comprehensive list of actions.



- 3.3 The statutory guidance requires local authorities to develop a protocol with the local police service to set out response to all children who run away or go missing in their area. In accordance with the guidance Nottingham City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council have jointly developed a protocol with Nottinghamshire police service, this is set out in the joint [Children Missing from Home and Care Protocol](#). This protocol relates to all children who go missing from their homes, it does not singularly relate to children in care.
- 3.4 When a child is reported as missing it is required that the level of risk is assessed by the police, the local protocol determines that a missing child will either be assessed as medium or high risk as opposed to low risk. The police risk assessment will take account of information gathered from the professional partnership as well as information from the child's parents/carers and will guide the police response.
- 3.5 Every child who goes missing must be offered a return home interview once they are found. The return home interview should be undertaken within 72 hours of the child returning home, it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that this work is completed and the statutory guidance recommends that it is best carried out by an independent person (i.e. someone not involved in caring for the child) who is trained to carry out these interviews and is able to follow-up any actions that emerge.
- 3.6 The role of the Nottingham City missing children's team is to act as a central point of contact for all missing children notifications and to undertake the return home interview, attend multi-agency meeting and if required refer to children's social care in line with the joint Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City Children's Safeguarding procedures which can be viewed at: [Children Missing from Home and Care Protocol](#).
- 3.7 When considering the prevalence of children who go missing from home or care it is challenging to understand the local context as compared to others as there is not published national data in relation to this. There is, however, national data in relation to the prevalence of missing in relation to children who are looked after (in care) by the local authority. This data indicates that over the last 5 years there has been a rise nationally of children in care going missing and with a dip during 2020/21 which it is believed has a direct link with covid and the national lock-downs.
- 3.8 Exploration of the data (table 1) indicates the following:
- The rate of children who had a missing incident in Nottingham has increased at a slower rate than our statistical neighbours (local authorities which have similar demographics determined by the DfE)
 - The percentage of children in care who have missing incident is slightly higher than statistical neighbours and the East Midlands region
 - The number of missing incidents per year has reduced in Nottingham whereas it has risen across the statistical neighbours and the East Midlands region
 - The average number of missing incidents per child is in line with statistical neighbours and the rest of East Midlands
 - The number of Nottingham child in care who went missing more than once during the year has only slightly risen as compared to more substantial rises in the statistical neighbour group and across the East Midlands.

		2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Children who had a missing incident during the year	Number	88	85	82	77	97	99	98	115	99	111	550	640	780	660	820
Children looked after during the year	Number	830	838	868	876	944	1,084	1,111	1,127	1,107	1,130	7,700	7,900	8,200	8,360	8,720
Percentage of whom had a missing incident during the year	%	11	10	9	9	10	9	9	10	9	9	7	8	10	8	9
Missing incidents during the year	Number	439	349	263	248	393	571	551	697	660	652	2,730	3,310	4,400	3,660	4,680
Average number of missing incidents per looked after child who went missing	Average	5	4	3	3	4	6	6	6	7	6	5	5	6	6	6
Children who went missing more than once during the year	Number	54	50	45	39	55	63	59	66	63	72	340	400	480	400	510

Table 1: Nottingham, statistical neighbour, and regional information in respect of missing information as relates to children in care

- 3.9 It is essential that children who go missing receive a swift and thorough response from practitioners skilled at supporting them to share information and who can assess the level of risk posed to the child.
- 3.10 A return home interview is an opportunity to discover information to help protect the child from going missing again, to reduce the instances of going missing and to reduce risks they may have been exposed to while missing or in their home.
- 3.11 The statutory guidance determines that the return home interview should:
- Identify and respond to any harm the child has suffered (this may or may not have been disclosed as part of the 'safe and well check') either before they ran away or while missing.
 - To understand and try to address the reasons why the child ran away.
 - To understand who they were with when missing and where they were found.
 - To understand what future risk there is of going missing.
 - Help the child feel safe and to understand they have options to prevent or reduce repeat instances of running away.
 - Provide the child with information on how to stay safe if they choose to run away again, including helpline numbers. g. Identify the support, in the form of a plan of action, the child requires on returning home or to their care placement.
- 3.12 Return home interviews should take place in a neutral setting where the child feels safe and be undertaken by an independent person who has sufficient knowledge and skill of working with children. It should not be someone involved in caring for the child; residential care staff or foster carers should not undertake the return home interview. The return home interview must take place with 72 hours of notification that the child has returned home.

- 3.13 The Ofsted inspection of children's services in July 2022 identified that improvement work was required to improve the quality and timeliness of return home interviews. Work has commenced to ensure greater oversight of this work and increased capacity to ensure improved timeliness of this work. The Missing Children's Team has increased resources since January 2023 with the recruitment of a Team Manager in addition to the existing 2 Children's Workers. Recruitment to 2 further Children's Worker posts is underway to double the capacity of the team. These workers shall be in place in April 2023. We are seeking to establish a stable and diverse team which will ensure that the children of Nottingham have access to a range of independent professionals who can support them following missing episodes.
- 3.14 There is no national data to allow us to compare to other local authorities in relation to completion of return home interviews. However, we know that our current timeliness in relation to completion of return home interviews needs to improve and we are committed to ensuring that this happens through the commitment of increased resourcing, development of improved performance reporting and the addition of a dedicated manager post who will have lead responsibility for improving both timeliness and quality in relation to this work. Currently we achieve 28% of return home interviews within 3 calendar days of children returning home after a missing period. The timescales in the national guidance are challenging therefore dedicated management oversight of this work is essential to support and ensure improvement in this area.
- 3.15 Since the Team Manager has been in post since January 2023, they have undertaken observation of the Missing Children's Teams Workers, by accompanying colleagues when they undertake return home interview with children who have been reported as missing to assess the quality of the interviews taking place. This will continue to happen along with a monthly programme of auditing and dip sampling.
- 3.16 With the completion of successful recruitment for additional children's workers we anticipate being able to demonstrate clear improvement in respect of both timeliness and quality of missing from home interviews. This is an area of focus during the next 3-6 months of our improvement work.

4. Responding to child exploitation

- 4.1 Councils have a duty under the Children Act 2004 to work with local police and health partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area. Local authority children's services departments are responsible for carrying out assessments of children deemed at risk of significant harm and working with partners to put in place plans to keep children safe where necessary. If a child has been being exploited, there may be a need for close collaboration across areas if this has taken place across borders, for example in the case of county lines.
- 4.2 There are Safeguarding Partners in each area who will work collaboratively to strengthen the child protection and safeguarding system in the local area. They will consist of the local authority, the integrated care board (ICB) for any area that falls under the LA, and the chief officer of police for any area that falls under the LA.
- 4.3 Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) is the statutory guidance outlines the responsibilities of councils and partners in relation to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The guidance applies to all organisations and agencies who have functions relating to children, including all councils, NHS, police, education, faith-based organisations and sports clubs.

- 4.4 The principles underpinning the response to the exploitation of children include:
- Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse
 - Exploited children should be treated as victims, not offenders
 - Exploitation includes sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and can also include neglect
 - Children do not make informed choices to enter or remain in exploitation, but do so from coercion, control, enticement, manipulation, or desperation
 - Children who are, or at risk of, being exploited will have varying levels of needs. They may have multiple vulnerabilities and therefore an appropriate multi-agency response and effective coordination and communication is essential
- 4.5 During the Ofsted inspection of children's services in July 2022 there was identification of positive practice in relation to practice in respect of responding to risk associated with exploitation. The report says: "Children who are at risk from criminal and sexual exploitation receive detailed assessments in which risk factors are identified and effective analysis of the impact of criminal and sexual exploitation on young people and their families is provided. Multi-agency meetings and subsequent planning lead to plans that effectively reduce risks to children. Plans are reviewed regularly, with actions being updated in recognition of changes in children's circumstances." However, this area of work is not static, and it is important that we remain well linked to other local authorities in order to further develop good practice and learn from others where appropriate.
- 4.6 In Nottingham if there are concerns about the safety of a child who may be at risk of or experiencing exploitation, a referral is made to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) where screening is undertaken to identify next steps. To make an informed decision the team share and gather information from partner agencies, children and their families and the most appropriate intervention is agreed in response to the child or young person's identified needs. The outcome of this screening could be signposting for Early Help services or for a detailed Children and Family Assessment to be completed by a Qualified Social Worker. An exploitation toolkit will be completed as part of this process to consider evidence of exploitation and inform analysis of the risk that may be being posed to the child.
- 4.7 All completed exploitation toolkits are reviewed by a Child Protection Coordinator to consider the level of risk identified. For children identified to be at medium or high risk of exploitation; a multi-agency Exploitation Risk Assessment Meeting (ERAM) will be convened. This meeting is chaired by an independent Child Protection Coordinator and is attended by partner agencies supporting the child including Police, Health and Education colleagues as well as other appropriate professionals. The child and their parents/carers will also be supported to attend the meetings.
- 4.8 The purpose of the meeting is to share all the information with partner agencies, to build a picture of what is happening in that child's life. It is also to identify other young people or adults who the child associates with who may be at risk or who may pose a risk. At the end of the meeting, a risk rating will be identified (low, medium or high) and a plan of multi-agency support agreed. These actions will aim to reduce risk, support children in their understanding of exploitation, prevent further harm and focus on holding perpetrators of exploitation to account.

- 4.9 Child exploitation toolkits are updated at regular intervals of following significant events to track the impact of intervention and review the level of risk posed to the child. ERAM meetings take place at regular intervals to review the risk level. For children identified to be at High risk, the meetings will take place every 8 weeks (minimum), those assessed to be at medium risk will be reviewed every 12 weeks (minimum). For children identified to be at low risk, a review meeting can be convened in response to changing risk levels or significant incidents.
- 4.10 Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings are held monthly to provide clear and consistent identification and assessment of children at risk of child exploitation. This meeting is attended by senior representatives from statutory partners including Social Care, Police, Health, Education, Substance Misuse Services, Voluntary Sector and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss children (or groups) identified to be at the highest risk, identify hotspot areas of the city where there is heightened activity increasing risk of exploitation, to identify targeted action which can be taken to disrupt the exploitation of vulnerable children and to ensure that there is effective information sharing across key professionals.
- 4.11 Services available to support children at risk of exploitation include:
- Parents against child exploitation (PACE) training for parents and carers
 - Outreach, mentoring and risk reduction work from the voluntary sector including Stronger People; Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges; Switch Up
 - Young people's groups including activity-based groups such as boxing activities
 - Sexual health services provided by Nottingham University Hospitals
 - Trafficking support team provided by Barnardos.
- 4.12 Services to children who are at risk of exploitation are delivered in partnership with statutory partners and the voluntary sector. These services include focusing on providing parents with increased understanding and strategies support their care of their children; as well as direct opportunities for children themselves to increase their understanding, offer opportunities for sharing their experiences and for positive intervention.

5 Strategic approach to addressing child exploitation in Nottingham City

- 5.1 There are many cross-cutting themes regarding exploitation in Nottingham that require close working with Nottinghamshire County Council. Therefore, both Safeguarding Children Partnerships have established the Cross Partnership Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Management Group. The group considers all elements of the national definition of exploitation and defines what areas of contextual safeguarding the group will focus on. Key Partners from Health, Police and Education are members of the group.
- 5.2 Its overarching aim is to:
- provide a strategic focussed, coordinated and integrated response to contextual safeguarding across Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire.
 - provide overarching governance of the various work streams and formulate a response to local and national learning.
 - provide assurance to the statutory partners through oversight of the multi-agency response.

- 5.3 Its role and function are to develop a Contextual Safeguarding Strategy and work plan, on behalf of both partnerships, that sets an approach and supports oversight of the co-ordinated response.
- 5.4 The work plan will include, but not be limited to, addressing the challenges posed by the recent National Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Safeguarding Children at Risk of Criminal Exploitation.
- 5.5 The four main areas to be addressed by the group are:
- Problem identification
 - Support for the workforce
 - Service design and practice development
 - Quality Assurance
- 5.6 The group requests specific reports as deemed necessary to inform understanding of the local performance its effectiveness and impact. It will link to regional groups through shared attendees providing relevant information and updates.
- 5.7 The group reports to the Business Management Group (BMG) in Nottingham City and the Safeguarding Assurance and Improvement Group (SAIG) in Nottinghamshire. Commencing in June 2023 they will report annually to the Senior Leadership Group of the Children’s Safeguarding Partnership.

6. Areas for Development

- 6.1 Within the Children’s Integrated Services we recognise that addressing exploitation is a key focus. It is essential that we are focused on ongoing and continuous service improvement to ensure the best outcomes for children. To ensure further service improvement activity planned in this area over the coming months includes:
- Expansion of the Missing Children’s Team through recruitment should lead to increased capacity by the team by April 2023; this will lead to increased performance in relation to timescales of Missing Return Interviews meaning more children will receive a timely response to any missing episodes
 - Exploitation will be a focus of partnership training and development workshops due to take place from May 2023 and which will be repeated every 3 months throughout the year. The focus of these sessions will include:
 - Identifying and recognising signs of exploitation
 - Appropriate use of language when working with young people at risk of exploitation
 - Completion of the exploitation toolkit to identify and assess risk posed to children at risk of exploitation
 - Partnership working to respond to exploitation
 - Implementation of practice guidance for Social Workers to support best practice to identify, assess and support children at risk of exploitation. This has been written and will be shared with the Social Work teams by the end of March 2023.
 - A review of MACE and CCE Panel is taking place to ensure the meetings offer effective strategic oversight of activity across the partnership focused on addressing exploitation. There is a joint commitment and priority between Children’s Services and the Police to ensure there is targeted focus on hotspot areas in the City linked to increased risk of exploitation as well as a focus on holding perpetrators of exploitation to account for their actions. This will be completed by end of April 2023.

