

Slough Borough Council

Information needed	Details
Report To:	Cabinet
Date:	21 October 2024
Subject:	Tackling the Exploitation of Children and Young Adults 2024-2026
Lead Member:	Councillor Puja Bedi, Lead Member Children Services
Chief Officer:	Sue Butcher
Contact Officer:	Ben Short and Donna Briggs
Ward(s):	All
Key Decision:	Yes
Exempt:	No
Decision Subject To Call In:	Yes
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Tackling the Exploitation of children and young adults Appendix 2 - Tackling the Exploitation of Children and Young Adults 2024-2026 Action Plan

1. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This strategy outlines a two-year plan through which the Slough Safeguarding Partnership will strengthen our safeguarding response to children and young adults in Slough who are exposed to risks of exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home. Partners in Slough are committed to putting first the safety and welfare of all our children and young adults and this strategy has been developed and produced with partners, practitioners, children and their families, and young adults.

2. Recommendation

Cabinet is recommended to approve the Slough partnership strategy 'Tackling the Exploitation of children and young adults' - Appendix 1

Commissioner review

Commissioners have reviewed the report and made no comment.

3. Report

Introduction

This report introduces Slough's strategy for tackling risks and harms from exploitation and violence faced by children and young adults. The purpose of this report is to outline our vision, ambition, principles, and priorities for action to tackle child and adolescent exploitation, violence and related harms outside the home. The priorities have been developed and agreed in partnership with agencies working across Slough and have been approved by the Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board in June 2024

4. Options considered

Options	Pros	Cons
<p>Option 1 Approve the strategy on behalf of the council</p> <p>Recommended</p>	<p>This will show the council's shared commitment to tackling exploitation of children and young adults</p> <p>The approval will provide reassurance to children and young people that the council is committed to their care and safety.</p> <p>The strategy aligns with the Serious Violence strategy and 'joins up' the approach across partnerships and Departments.</p>	<p>No negative implications have been identified.</p>
<p>Option 2 Do not approve the strategy on behalf of the council</p> <p>Not recommended</p>	<p>No positives have been identified. if not approved the Council still retains its duties to provide a response to children and young adults who are being harmed, alongside our partners.</p>	<p>Will send a negative message to the partnership and communities.</p> <p>A missed opportunity to align the strategic approach across departments.</p>

5. Background

- 5.1. This strategy outlines eight evidence-informed principles for multi-agency practice, based on national research, and four priorities for action on tackling risks and harms from exploitation and violence faced by children and young adults. Each of the four strategic priorities requires commitment and action from all council departments, and from multi-agency partners in Slough.
- 5.2. A safeguarding practice review in response to the tragic homicide of a young adult in Slough in September 2023 has informed all aspects of this strategy, as has learning from another tragic homicide in May 2022.
- 5.3. The strategy includes up-to-date evidence from local, regional, and national reviews, and is informed by learning from the review of Criminally Exploited Children, chaired by Professional Alexis Jay CBE, published March 2024.
- 5.4. The strategy demonstrates how partners in Slough commit to collaboration in our response to the needs of children and young adults. Once we have strong foundations in place, we aspire to develop a safeguarding offer across developmental stages in response to vulnerable young adults. Such an approach, known as **transitional safeguarding**, 'builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adults' safeguarding practice and prepares young people for their adult lives' ([Holmes and Smale 2018](#)). This strategy lays foundations for a step-change, so that all our children and all vulnerable adults are protected from harms.

Definitions

- 5.5. Tackling violence and exploitation are a key focus for Slough Borough Council, and we know we have a lead role to play in creating safety with our children, young adults, their families and communities, so that everyone feels safer.
- 5.6. The exploitation of children and young adults is a complex type of abuse that takes different forms. The definitions below are in summary form only for brevity in this report. Further information and related definitions are included in the strategy.
- 5.7. **Child criminal exploitation** is where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child, young person or vulnerable young adult to undertake an activity which constitutes a criminal offence. In England there is currently no statutory definition of child criminal exploitation (written as CCE).
- 5.8. **Child sexual exploitation** is a form of child sexual abuse. This abuse occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person or vulnerable adult into sexual activity. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual.

5.9. **Human trafficking** involves the recruitment, harbouring, movement of receiving of children or adults for exploitation using threat, force, fraud, or the abuse of vulnerability.

5.10. **Modern slavery** is the common 'umbrella' term for all kinds of slavery, trafficking, and exploitation, involving children and adults.

6. **Key issues for consideration by cabinet**

6.1. Slough Safeguarding Partnership has led a review of our approach to safeguarding children and young adults from harms from exploitation and violence. This has been undertaken as part of a safeguarding practice review, launched early 2024 in response to the tragic death of a young adult from Slough in September 2023, and is also informed by learning from a previous homicide in May 2022.

6.2. It is widely understood in Slough, and nationally, that exploitation is a complex, multi-faceted form of abuse, and that to tackle the risks and harms involves a wide range of organisations, stakeholders, and a partnership approach with our local community.

Consultation with children

6.3. Our approach to the development of this strategy has sought the voice and lived experiences of children, families, and professionals in Slough. For example, in July 2024, children who are currently attending alternative education provision with Haybrook College Trust participated in consultation through focus sessions. These sessions sought the views of groups of children about safety, exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home in Slough. At these focus sessions, children told us:

- They have some understanding of risks and harms outside the home, associated with criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, 'County Lines', grooming, debt bondage, trafficking, and other forms of abuse.
- There are places and spaces in Slough where they feel safe, such as at school and in some cases, at home.
- There are places and spaces in Slough where they do not feel safe, due to: unlit parks, streets and alleyways, groups congregating at night, experiences and fears of bullying, crime, gangs, drug-dealing, and weapons-related injuries.
- They feel that professionals in Slough do not always provide help and support to children and young adults when this is most needed.
- Professionals need more training to provide a caring response to help children and young adults to help keep them safe.
- Professionals change too often and sometimes support is too late.

- 6.4. Enhancing children and young adults' voice and influence is priority two of our strategy (4.6 below) and will be integral to further development of our work, including in designing our launch event and professional development opportunities, and involvement in delivering our action plan. We will share our strategy and action plan with the children who participated in the focus sessions, and with the education professionals who coordinated the sessions.
- 6.5. Slough Children First will create further opportunities for children and young adults to be actively involved and influence design and delivery of our action plan and services for tackling risks from exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home throughout the life of the strategy. This approach is aligned with our Children & Young People's Participation Strategy approved by Cabinet in November 2023.

Four priorities for 2024-2026

- 6.6. While the safeguarding practice review is in progress, partners have agreed to the proactive development of a strategy, with four key priorities, in direct response to the emerging learning from the review. These priorities have been developed and agreed by partners via the Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board – partners, council departments, police, health, education, and others – with the aim of laying strong foundations for an effective safeguarding response to all children and young adults who are exposed to risks and harms from exploitation and violence.
- 6.7. There is currently no one coordinated strategy and action plan to make sure that in Slough we have a consistent, reliable offer of preventative help and support to children and young adults who are experiencing risks and harms from exploitation and violence. The four priorities are designed to support all partners in Slough to get lay strong foundations to respond to this gap.
- 6.8. The priorities are designed to complement and enhance work already underway and to set the intention to strengthen our existing multi-agency policy and practice, wherever necessary. For example, Slough Children First has collaborated with partners in the design and initiation of a Strategic multi-agency child exploitation (Strategic MACE) arrangements, to improve oversight and analysis of risks and harms associated with risks and harms, and to drive improvement in information sharing. A dedicated Head of Adolescent Support will lead implementation of this strategy and action plan, overseen and supported by strong partnership approach to Strategic MACE.
- 6.9. The following priorities have been created together so that our strategic plan complements both the [Slough Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027](#), and the Early Help Partnership Strategy 2023-2027. Indicative outcome and impact measures have been included, although priority three will drive the development of a more robust outcome and performance framework.

PRIORITY ONE: Put the safety and welfare of children and young adults first. Too often, our service procedures take priority, and we lose sight of the fact that babies, children, and young adults are exposed to risks and harms, including poverty, inequalities, abuse, and other adversity during childhood. This priority demands a system reset to focus on the responsibility of our professionals to put first safety, welfare and agency of our children and young adults.

- Commit to developing organisational cultures where everyone puts first the safety and welfare of children and young adults.
- Prioritise multi-agency workforce development, learning opportunities, and quality assurance to drive implementation of this priority.
- Headline outcome: increased application of evidence-informed practice to tackle exploitation and violence affecting children and young adults.
- Headline impact: reduced numbers harmed by exploitation and violence.

PRIORITY TWO: Seek and highlight the voice and lived experience of children and young adults. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 12 states that ‘every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously’ and Article 23 states that ‘a child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in their community’. This international vision drives our local commitment.

- Commit to embedding participatory practice across our strategic, operational and practice responses to exploitation and violence, in single agency settings and across our local partnership.
- Create meaningful opportunities for children and young adults to influence change at the level of partnership governance.
- Headline outcome: increased involvement of children and young adults with direct influence on policy and delivery.
- Headline impact: improved perception of children and young adults, families and communities of our action on safety and welfare issues in Slough.

PRIORITY THREE: Improve our insight, communication, and learning:

We know that crucial data and intelligence are held by different agencies in Slough, and that if we bring this together effectively, we can create a step change in our insight and evidence and significantly improve our response to tackling exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home. In turn, we know that good quality insight must drive our communication campaigns and professional development plans so that we can support families, communities, agencies and businesses to understand and respond effectively to risks and harms.

- Commit to using data and intelligence to identify, analyse and communicate the patterns of exploitation, violence, and harms in Slough.

- Seek to understand how, where and when harm is happening, to which individuals and groups, and its impact.
- Deliver effective communication strategy for insight and action plans that supports understanding of risks, harms, and our collective response, beginning with a multi-agency launch event in October 2024.
- Provide professional development that supports multi-agency learning and sustains continuous improvement of our response to exploitation and violence.
- Share our action plans and impact with all professionals in Slough to gain their commitment to further collaboration in creating safety from violence and all forms of exploitation, violence and harms outside the home.
- Promote relationships-based approaches to providing help and support for children, young adults and families to prevent harm from violence and exploitation.
- Headline outcome: improve adherence to data-driven practice through weekly, monthly and quarterly MACE response to risks and harms.
- Headline impact: improved use of collective resources to create safety with children and young adults

PRIORITY FOUR: Collaborative leadership and relational approach to tackling exploitation and violence. We can create the step change we need where leaders across council departments are willing to hold courageous conversations that challenge thinking. We can bring about culture change for trauma-responsive, relational approaches to tackling exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home.

- Commit to create a culture of collaboration, with strength-based and relational approaches to multi-agency partnership working.
- Leaders will promote clear expectations that exploitation and violence are understood contextually and that all responses focus on actions to create safety with children and young adults. Leaders across sectors will collaborate to raise awareness of exploitation and violence with our communities.
- Headline outcome measure: improved coordination of multi-agency response of help and support to prevent harm from exploitation and violence

- *Headline impact measure:* improved agency of children and young adults to connect with positive activities and support to divert from risks and harms.

Whole-system approach complementary to Serious Violence Strategy

- 6.10. This strategy is interdependent with the [Slough Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027](#). There is national government programme which supports the Regional Violence Reduction Units. The Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership undertakes the regional function working closely with Slough via Safer Slough Partnership. This includes work on strengthening work within the borough on reducing and addressing violence and responding to the experience of significant risk and harm outside the home.
- 6.11. This strategy is also interdependent with the [Slough Children First Business and Improvement Plan](#).
- 6.12. Our Slough strategy for tackling risks and harms from exploitation and violence affecting and faced by children and young adults extends the remit of our Serious Violence Strategy, by including a much sharper focus on safety and welfare. The plan sets out how we will communicate with and work with our communities in standing up to exploitation, violence, and related harm from weapons-related injury other harms in the community.
- 6.13. Our approach features five interconnected layers, which are complementary with the [Slough Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027](#).
- 6.14. **Partnership and collective leadership:** taking a whole place approach means actively involving stakeholders from voluntary, community and faith sector, wider public and private sectors. Our work on exploitation, violence, and related harms will be in partnership with and for our communities. Our approach is not constrained by organisational boundaries or professional sector.
- 6.15. **Preparation and insight:** responding to the complexity of exploitation, violence, and related harms by applying critical analysis, committing to reflection and learning from insight. Applying evidence synthesis and data analysis, making use of multiple sources of intelligence to build an accurate picture of exploitation and violence in our local area, and to understand what is happening in the lives of children and young adults. We will use insight gained to better identify and act on pressures facing our communities, including inequalities and structural harms, such as poverty and housing issues.
- 6.16. **Prevention and early intervention:** creating opportunities in all direct practice for developing trusted relationships with children and young adults, and working in partnership with their families. Developing the knowledge, skills, and confidence across all partner agencies for prevention approaches to exploitation and violence with children, families, and communities. This layer will be bolstered through the creation of an Adolescent Support

Service, which will be led by Slough Children First, in collaboration with partners. The service brings together our offers for children aged ten upwards, in response to child exploitation, missing, youth justice, and edge of care. The aim of the service is to prevent and reduce the risk to children from harms outside of the home. Co-ordination of these teams and improved partnership working will lead to more effective responses to promote safety and welfare with children and young adults.

- 6.17. **Protection and intervention:** integrated support and protection services with evidence-based and trauma-attuned responses to children and young adults who are exploited and to those who are at risk of harming others. Prioritising safety, and promoting welfare and agency, we will commit to shifting away from criminalisation of children and young adults, toward addressing mental health and social issues.
- 6.18. **Repair, disruption and recovery:** improving our multi-agency response to disrupt exploitation and violence affecting children and young adults by providing evidence-informed support and trauma-attuned treatment for recovery. We will continue to develop our contextual and cross-border working arrangements to stop those who harm others and who exploit children and young adults for their own gain.

Governance

- 6.19. The development of the strategy has been led by Slough Safeguarding partnership. It receives strategic oversight, scrutiny, and challenge from the Partnership's strategic Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) group. This group reports to Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board and Executive. Slough Safeguarding Partnership Board incorporates the statutory functions of the Safeguarding Children partnership and Safeguarding Adult Board. A performance framework has been developed and includes data analysis as well as multi-agency audit. This group will produce an annual report on progress made which will be presented to the Safeguarding Partnership Executive Group.
- 6.20. Implementation of this strategy is the responsibility of the Slough MACE Strategy group, which will drive the whole-system approach to tackling exploitation and violence, focused on how strategic leaders, managers and direct practitioners can keep welfare, safety and agency of children and young adults at the centre of their work.
- 6.21. This strategy for tackling risks from exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home faced by children and young adults is interdependent with:
- Slough Early Help Partnership Strategy 2023-2027
 - Slough Serious Violence Strategy 2024-2027
 - Slough Children First Business and Improvement Plan 2023-2026

- Slough Children First Children and Young People's Participation Strategy

7. **Policy implications for the council**

7.1. The Council Corporate Plan 2023-2027 sets strategic priorities for children and young adults to thrive, and for a town where residents can live healthier, safer and more independent lives. This strategy contributes to these two crucial strategic priorities, and its delivery requires commitment in principle and practice from all council departments.

8. **Financial implications**

- 8.1. The strategy sets out our priorities for children and young adults who are exposed to risk and harm from exploitation, violence, and outlines whole-system actions and improvements that the council and all our partners can make to prevent this abuse. Whilst there are no direct financial implications of the strategy, preventing and addressing harm to children and young adults has significant benefits long term for emotional wellbeing, mental and physical health, which is anticipated to reduce the future need for more costly services that address higher levels of need, risk, and harm in later life.
- 8.2. The strategy identifies the need for staff retention, more training and the alignment of data and intelligence across different agencies to provide insight into a more informed communication campaign. This will need to be achieved through existing resource levels or alternative funding opportunities.
- 8.3. Children who are being considered for care but have not entered it, defined as 'Edge of Care', will be supported to remain in their family home. This will avoid entering care alongside an increase in the reunification of children coming home from care, where appropriate. This will contribute to reduction in placement costs, particularly in the high-cost residential placements for those children with complex needs around Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Edge of care support will also impact legal fees as they will also reduce as the volume of proceedings reduce.
- 8.4. With this support and the focus on Priority 3 in Slough Children First's Business and Improvement Plan that all children in our care have a stable place to live, our placement numbers will start to fall, particularly in the high-cost residential placements for those children with complex needs around Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). The edge of care focus will also impact legal fees as they will also reduce as the volume of proceedings reduce.
- 8.5. In 2024/25, it is hoped that by the end of the year, 3 children can be returned home or kept out of care, leading to an estimated cost avoidance of £65k, that may deliver a saving against budget. If this approach can be developed further then it may be possible consolidate savings over future years as the

strategy is embedded. The impact of this policy should be reported in revenue monitoring reports.

9. **Legal implications**

- 9.1. The Council has overarching responsibility for safeguarding all children in their area. This duty is shared with Slough Children First, as the Council has contracted out specific children social care functions. The Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004 include specific duties in relation to children in need and children suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm (under sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act 1989). Section 10 and 11 of the Children Act 2004 require prescribed agencies, including local authorities, to cooperate to promote the wellbeing of children and young people when carrying out their functions and the Council is required to consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people when carrying out its functions.

The Council has a duty under s.17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder and serious violence (amongst other matters).

The Council has specific duties in relation to children in care. This includes unaccompanied asylum seeking children and other migrant children, who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Statutory guidance on the care of unaccompanied migrant children emphasises the need to keep policies and performance relating to unaccompanied children and child victims of modern slavery, including trafficking, under review. A cohesive multi-agency approach is deemed essential to protect these child victims from further risk and prevent further exploitation. Local authority multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are key to ensuring effective oversight.

The Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 guidance refers to the need for a multi-agency approach to protect children from exploitation. This includes ensuring effective training is in place for practitioners across the system to identify and recognise signs of exploitation and new and emerging threats and that early help systems should recognise children at risk of exploitation. Local protocols are expected to reflect the specific needs of certain groups, including children with special educational needs and disabilities, children in mental health settings, children with specific communication needs, asylum seeking children, children at risk of criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation and children who are in the youth justice system.

In addition to statutory guidance, the Council and its partners should take account of non-statutory guidance and national research and best practice. For instance there is non statutory guidance on Child Sexual Exploitation which emphasises the need to move beyond a reactive approach, take account of the local profile, engage with diversity (some cohorts of children and young people are at particularly risk of having their abuse identified or responded to, including males, children with disabilities, children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender and children from specific ethnic groups) and ensure effective cross-area working.

3 Risk management implications

The strategy sets out the strategic vision for our partnership approach to tackling the exploitation of children and young adults in Slough. By virtue of the children and young people we seek to protect and support, there are inherent risks which exist towards them because of the people who are abusing or exploiting them. This is a highly complex area of work which requires close collaboration and sharing of information across the partnership to enable protective action to be undertaken. Those duties already exist within legislation such as Children Act 1989 and 2004, Children and Social Work Act (2017). There are also a range of statutory requirements issued in relation to the safeguarding of children including Working Together (2023). Therefore those risks already exist within the work being undertaken.

4 Environmental implications

No environmental impacts have been identified as a result of this strategy.

5 Equality implications

(See Appendix 1)

6 Procurement implications

No procurement implications have been identified

7 Workforce implications

No workforce implications have been identified as a result of this strategy.

8 Property implications

No property implications have been identified.

9 Corporate parenting impact

9.1 This strategy will ensure that the Council continues to foster collective work with partners to improve policy and practice in the best interests of care experienced children and young adults, in line with contemporary research, evidence, lived experience and shared learning.

9.2 The strategy promotes safeguarding from exploitation, violence, and harms outside the home as a shared endeavour. The four priorities will strengthen

the focus of our responses, support shared use of resources, knowledge, and language to improve the response to care experienced children and young adults. This is particularly important for our cared for and cared experienced young adults, who have heightened needs and risks of harm in places and spaces outside the home, and in their transitions to adulthood.

- 9.3** The strategy places strong emphasis on vulnerability during adolescence, which is crucial in work with care experienced children and young adults. Cross-team, multi-disciplinary and community working is key to this, to develop shared understanding of needs, risks, and responses. It is vital that the Council, as the corporate parent, advocates for the safety, welfare, and positive outcomes, and contributes to creating conducive conditions for our care experienced children and young adults to thrive.

Background Papers

None