



Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership



The Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership Vulnerable Adolescents: Strategy to Protect Young People from Extra-Familial Harm

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Adolescence is a transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period from puberty to young adulthood. Adolescence is usually associated with the teenage years, but its physical, psychological or cultural expressions may begin earlier and end later.
- 1.2 A thorough understanding of adolescence in society depends on information from various perspectives, including psychology, biology, history, sociology, education, and anthropology. Within all of these perspectives, adolescence is viewed as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, whose cultural purpose is the preparation of children for adult roles. It is a period of multiple transitions involving education, training, employment, and unemployment, as well as transitions from one living circumstance to another.
- 1.3 One of the most significant features of this age group is the openness they have to external influences, i.e. outside of the home and the family. This is a natural development and can be extremely beneficial but is not without risk.
- 1.4 The aim of this document is to detail the strategy being adopted by Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership to address and reduce the impact on adolescents where risk is a feature and may leave young people vulnerable to exploitation and experiences of significant harm in extra-familial situations. Of course, the broader range of experiences and risks that impact on all young people equally have an influence on this sub-cohort.
- 1.5 The risks adolescents face are distinct. They differ from those facing children and older groups, as do the impacts of those risks, creating a distinctive set of inter-connected needs. Adolescence itself offers a distinctive array of strengths and opportunities that emerge because of social and physiological developmental processes.
- 1.6 Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. 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. Therefore, a Contextual Safeguarding approach, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts.

- 1.7 This strategy has been written with reference to other local strategies, including: the NSCP's Neglect Strategy; the Norfolk Strategy to Prevent Radicalisation; and the Norfolk County Lines Strategy. Recommendations from local and national Serious Case Reviews and Safeguarding Practice Reviews have informed the strategic aims and relevant recommendations will be incorporated into a robust action plan, underpinning this document
- 1.8 The Protecting Young People from Extra-Familial Harm Strategy will be delivered by the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Partnership Board's Vulnerable Adolescent Group (VAG). Discrete working groups have been established to improve practice in: targeted youth support; contextual safeguarding; partnership working; and operational oversight. The governance structure for the VAG is included as Appendix 1.

2. Definitions

Adolescents can experience significant harm as a result of a range of exploitative methods of abuse as outlined in the definitions below.

- 2.1 ***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 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. 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
- 2.2 ***Child Sexual Exploitation*** is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.²

¹ "I thought I was the only one. The only one in the world": The Office of the Children's Commissioner's Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation In Gangs and Groups (2011) Children's Commissioner

² [Statutory definition of child sexual exploitation - Government consultation \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/544222/statutory-definition-of-child-sexual-exploitation-gov-uk-2016.pdf) (2016)

- 2.3 **County Lines** is 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 young people and vulnerable adults to move [and store] the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.³
- 2.4 **Serious Youth Violence** There are several definitions that describe ‘Serious Youth Violence’ but the one element that they all have in common is that they all focus on the age of the person involved in the incident and the gravity of the offence: The Home Office develops the notion of ‘Serious Youth Violence’ being associated with children who are involved or at the periphery of ‘county lines’ and negative peer groups and concerning children involved in ‘county lines’ and other related activities as per the definition above. For the purposes of this strategy, in Norfolk we are treating serious youth violence as any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime involving a young person under the age of 18 in an extra-familial setting. This may be in relation to county lines and/or criminal exploitation or in a separate contextual setting.
- 2.5 **Radicalisation** is defined as the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups.
⁴Radicalisation has a devastating effect on young people, families and communities and adolescents are particularly vulnerable. Many teenagers look for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging, and are in search of adventure and excitement. Extremist groups, whether far-right, Islamist, animal rights or any other ideology, claim to offer the answers and promise vulnerable young people a sense of identity.

Radicalisation is increasingly happening through technology and many isolated and vulnerable young people spend a lot of time online which exposes them to risk. Extremist groups’ use of internet and social media has become a prolific way for them to spread their ideology.

3. Vision and Principles:

- 3.1 Our vision is that every child and young person in Norfolk will be safe from extra-familial harm, principally child exploitation, serious youth violence and radicalisation.
- 3.2 We recognise the safeguarding parallels between child exploitation and radicalisation. We are cognisant of the pre-existing Norfolk Countywide Community Safety Partnership’s (CCSP) Prevent Strategy & Delivery Plan, which seeks to address vulnerability to radicalisation in children and young people as well as in adults. The Chair of the Prevent Delivery Group is a

³ [Criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: county lines - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/criminal-exploitation-of-children-and-vulnerable-adults-county-lines)

⁴ [Keeping children safe in education - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/keeping-children-safe-in-education)

standing member of the VAG and, wherever possible, we will seek to support the Prevent Strategy & Delivery Plan, coordinate our messaging and training, promote awareness of the Channel Panel process and encourage appropriate referrals.

The NSCP adheres to the following principles in the development and implementation of this strategy:

3.2 Principles that relate directly to young people

- Exploitation of young people is a child protection issue.
- Young people who have been criminally exploited are often themselves the victims of crime.
- Young people are children first and offenders second; their behaviours are a form of communication. In exploitation scenarios, their choices and sense of agency are influenced by external factors.
- Young people's involvement in decisions about their lives can increase safety.
- The importance of school life and access to education is paramount to the young person's sense of identity and belonging
- Young people can encounter significant harm in a range of settings beyond their families. An understanding of where harm emanates from should inform the focus of safeguarding activity.
- Parents/carers are a key partner in helping to mitigate risks posed to young people.
- All young people are vulnerable to exploitation, not just specific groups.
- Early childhood trauma impacts on adolescent development; children and young people need help to understand both counter-intuitive survival techniques as well as resilience factors in order to overcome adversity, build trusting healthy relationships and fulfil their potential.
- Young people's needs and behaviours should be understood in the wider context of their lives at home, friendship circles, health, education and public spaces (including on line) and in the context of the vulnerabilities that impact on them such as criminal and sexual exploitation.
- Young people's needs and safety must come first. Professionals need to work flexibly, even when the child is unwilling to engage.
- Relationships between young people and professionals that are based on consistency, stability and respectful communication have the most impact in supporting effective interventions.

3.3 Principles that relate to services and systems intended to support young people

- Clear systems must be in place at the 'front door' of services so that young people at risk of exploitation are identified and receive a prompt and appropriate response⁵.

⁵ Ofsted, (2017) *Creating an effective 'front door'*, www.gov.uk/government/speeches/social-care-monthly-commentary-march-2017.

- Existing working processes should be enhanced to enable swift, flexible and effective safeguarding responses for young people who are being exploited. Services must be coordinated and easily accessible.
- Multi-agency assessment, planning and intervention is critical to achieving good outcomes for vulnerable young people.
- We will work together to address perpetrators through a range of disruption tactics
- A whole system approach will protect and support victims.
- Schools and colleges are essential partners in a whole-system approach, particularly in the context of awareness raising, identification of those at risk and safety planning.
- All agencies in Norfolk must share their information to enable them to recognise, understand and respond to the risks of exploitation to young people in the local area.
- Safeguarding vulnerable adolescents requires prevention and intervention activity beyond individual work. This includes a range of contexts including peer groups, spaces and communities.
- Professionals need to understand the impact of exploitation and patterns of engagement and disengagement of vulnerable young people. They need to 'stay with the child'
- Young people do not cease to be vulnerable when they turn eighteen. Transitional safeguarding is required to support Norfolk's young people into safe successful adulthood.
- Professionals will use appropriate and respectful language in relation to young people exposed to extra-familial harm.
- In all cases the impact of extra-familial harm on children and young people's mental and sexual health should be considered.

4. Strategic Aims and Objectives

The strategic aims set out in this strategy apply to all areas sitting under the Vulnerable Adolescent Group, i.e. targeted youth support, contextual safeguarding, partnership working and operational oversight. The objectives/ high level actions we will take to achieve the strategic aim and the rationale behind them are listed against each strategic statement below.

- 4.1 **We will raise awareness across Norfolk of the risks of extra-familial harm posed to children and young people.** In order to support the prevention from harm agenda, communication campaigns will be co-ordinated with a robust training offer on all aspects of extra-familial harm to support both the young people, parents/carers and the professionals responsible for ensuring their safety. This will include a better understanding of adolescent development, targeted services and services for teenagers transitioning into adulthood.

Objectives:

- Resources and signposting to specialist services - including Targeted Youth Support Service and Harmful Sexual Behaviour Team - pulled together into a dedicated online platform on the NSCP website.
- Communication campaign highlighting the risks and opportunities faced by adolescents in this phase of their development
- Consultation with young people on direct messaging
- Communities, including local businesses, schools and residents, are enabled to identify adolescent vulnerability and the signs and symptoms of exploitation; communities are part of the solution.
- Multi-agency and single agency training offer developed in contextual safeguarding and adolescent brain development with a focus on trauma informed practice and developing positive relationships, including the appropriate use of language, i.e. not victim blaming.

4.2 **The multi-agency partnership will work together to ensure early identification/intervention of children and young people, at risk of exploitation, individually or in cohorts.** Partnership activity in Norfolk will engage a broad range of organisations and individuals in the protection of vulnerable adolescents in extra-familial setting. This will enable the NSCP to ensure young people vulnerable to exploitation are identified early and supported by their families/carers, professionals, and their community to prevent and build resilience against exploitation.

Objectives:

- Support is provided in relation to the level of risk of extra-familial harm rather than protective factors in the home. Parents, including absent parents, are considered as safeguarding partners and part of the solution.
- Schools and education providers are supported to provide whole school and individual programmes that address the well-documented links between young people missing education (in particular those excluded from mainstream school) and increased safeguarding risk, including the risk of exploitation.
- Responses for young people who go missing from home or care⁶ are swift and effective in reducing associated risk.
- Professionals engaged in providing universal and targeted services to young people, are empowered to identify harmful behaviours and support young people to build positive and healthy attitudes towards relationships and friendships.

⁶ Like return home interviews, strategy meetings, family group conferencing and trigger planning

- Research based interventions that reduce risk and vulnerability are delivered to individuals and groups, with a particular focus on building trusting relationships.

4.3 **We will improve the multi-agency safeguarding response to children and young people who are known to be exploited.** We will ensure that the support provided is enduring and delivered for as long as they need, ensuring that what is offered is appropriate to the assessed needs of each individual young person and based on their gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and the nature of the exploitation that they have experienced.

Objectives:

- The safeguarding adolescents' system seeks whenever possible to focus on creating safety for adolescents in the contexts within which they may find themselves at risk of extra-familial harm, rather than removing them from harmful contexts by relocating them.
- Relationship based practice underpins work with children who are known or believed to be exploited
- Voice of young people is clearly recorded in plans and their feedback on interventions is used to inform service development.
- Comprehensive multi-agency assessments identify risk within families and different contexts, especially within extra-familial relationships, peer groups and environments that impact upon the safety of adolescents.
- Arrangements in place to support the sharing, management and review of risk to the young person' in partnership with the parent/carer, the young person's natural and professional network and most importantly the young person themselves, resulting in a person specific plan developed with measurable outcomes to reduce risk. Where relevant contextual safeguarding conferences will be convened.
- A single process ensures victims and families affected by exploitation are identified, referred and assessed.

4.4 **We will identify exploiters and disrupt their activity through the use of Modern Slavery legislation and other tactics.** The partnership will work together to ensure that those who seek to harm or exploit young people are identified, disrupted and convicted.

Objectives:

- Effective multi-agency engagement, joint planning and information sharing enables application of the full range of disruption tactics available through both criminal and civil routes to protect young people, including powers available in relation to modern slavery, licensing, health and safety, fraud, housing provision and other related legislation.
- Leaders, managers and practitioners from across the partnership understand the local problem profile and intelligence picture to support disruption:

analytical support is coordinated across a range of agencies to identify themes, patterns and trends relating to exploitation activity and adolescent vulnerability.

- Stronger intelligence gathering and sharing across the partnership on individuals, peer groups and geographic hotspots engages a tactical response, to both disrupt perpetrators and target interventions that make young people safer.

- 4.5 **All of the strategic aims above will be supported through strong strategic leadership.** Political leaders, Chief Executives and senior leaders are committed to establishing a culture within which abuse, and exploitation is not tolerated. Norfolk promotes a culture that encourages professional curiosity, challenge and appropriate escalation of concerns.

Through this strategy we will ensure that vulnerable adolescents in Norfolk communities benefit from best practice through integrated multi-agency working, enlisting the support of Norfolk community leaders. Norfolk's strategic leaders will engage with key statutory, VCSE and private sector partners to plan; prevention, identification, support and disruption activities. Strategic leaders from across the partnership are fully committed to engaging their staff in this work.

5 Measuring Impact

- 5.1 This strategy will have a detailed action plan sitting underneath it to monitor progress against the objectives, including key milestones.
- 5.2 Quantitative and qualitative measures are included against this priority in the NSCP Business Plan.
- 5.3 The strategy and working group, specifically the Exploitation Operational Oversight Forum, will regularly review an iterative data dashboard to monitor direction of travel as a result of this strategy implementation.
- 5.4 As an NSCP priority, mechanisms are in place to ensure that the strategy implementation is timely and monitored for impact.

6. Leadership and Governance

- 6.1 The Vulnerable Adolescents Group (VAG) equates to the 'we' in this strategy. VAG has clear Terms of Reference and representation from strategic leaders from across the partnership.
- 6.2 The Chair reports regularly to the NSCP Partnership Group, with appropriate links made to relevant partnership boards. Delivery of the strategy will be supported by the workstreams as identified in Appendix 1.

7. Links to other groups and strategies

7.1 The Vulnerable Adolescent Group will identify appropriate links and coordinate work with other groups and forums including, but not limited to:

- Neglect Strategy Implementation Group
- New Roads Implementation Board
- County Lines Strategy Group
- Youth Justice Board Pathfinder Project
- Project ADDER
- Prevent Delivery Group (Vulnerability to Radicalisation)

8. Strategy Review

8.1 To ensure that any emerging issues, legislative, process or policy changes are accounted for this strategy will reviewed on an annual basis with more comprehensive reviews taking place after three years and five years respectively.

Appendix 1: Vulnerable Adolescents Group Governance Structure

