

# Tackling Violence and Exploitation

Wolverhampton's Strategy

 **Wolverhampton**  
A Safe City

Operating as Wolverhampton's Local Police & Crime Board



# Contents

Glossary of Terms	2
Foreword	3
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	6
Child Sexual Exploitation	10
Child Criminal Exploitation	11
Modern Slavery	12
Gangs and Youth Crime	13
Strategic Outcomes	14
Early Areas of Focus	15
Recognising Increased Risk	16
The Four P Model	17
Equalities	18

## Glossary of Terms

**ACE** - Adverse Childhood experience

**ASB** - Anti-Social Behaviour

**CCE** - Child Criminal Exploitation

**CSE** - Child Sexual Exploitation

**CSP** - Community Safety Partnership

**MASH** - Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub

**MS** - Modern Slavery

**NRM** - National Referral Mechanism

**OCG** - Organised Crimes Group

**PCC** - Police and Crime Commissioner

**SWP** - Safer Wolverhampton Partnership

**USG** - Urban Street Gang

**V&E** - Violence and Exploitation

**VPA** - Violence Prevention Alliance

**VRU** - Violence Reduction Unit

**WASP** - Wolverhampton and Walsall  
Anti-Slavery Partnership

**WMPFA** - West Midlands Police Force Area

**WSAB** - Wolverhampton Safeguarding  
Adults Board

**WSCB** - Wolverhampton Safeguarding  
Children Board

## Foreword



Wolverhampton has taken the bold stance of committing to a fresh approach to address issues of violence and exploitation (V&E) in the city, recognising that the ever-evolving landscape of exploitation requires a more flexible and agile approach across partners and a commitment to tackle violence and exploitation in its entirety.

The complex and exploitative world of Organised Crime Groups<sup>1</sup> (OCGs), which are often driven by money, power or control, leaves the door open for adults or children to be enticed or coerced into situations they then struggle to remove themselves from. Our insights into these practices highlight an increasing level of cross-over between crime types that have historically been dealt with separately from one another.

Gang activity can sometimes involve the trafficking of victims to sell drugs; violence may be perpetrated, young people may be classed

as 'missing' or caught up in debt bondage, face physical or sexual harm or be forced into committing crime. Vulnerable adults may also be subjected to 'cuckooing', where their homes are taken over by unscrupulous dealers. These complex situations require an integrated response. Whilst we have already taken huge steps to join up the city's safeguarding practices with a well-established adults and children's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), this strategy commits to the removal of remaining siloed working practices and barriers which will facilitate integration.

Our ambition is for swifter information flow, earlier identification and support for those at risk, a raised awareness across communities and a lessening of the risks of being forced or lured into these situations. The approach is not solely focused on supporting victims however; strengthening our collective response and the intelligence picture of how OCGs operate will

<sup>1</sup> Organised Crime is criminal activity involving more than one criminal, involves control, planning and use of specialist resources, causes significant harm or has the potential to do so and creates material gain, (usually financial) or has the potential to do so.

also inform the criminal justice and disruption practices of our enforcement partners.

Regionally, there is an acceptance and an appetite for developing an agreed model across the West Midlands; a shared narrative is in development to inform and coordinate a tighter regional response, informed by data insight to drive the use of our collective resource. This is a crucial step, given OCG practices often extend beyond geographic boundaries.

The complex nature of this issue means that uniquely, our strategy has shared governance between Safer Wolverhampton Partnership

(SWP) and Adults and Children Safeguarding Boards. Operational governance underpinning these strategic boards is being reviewed to ensure a streamlined and efficient response, from operational oversight through to case management arrangements. The first year of our strategy will drive the necessary change to make this happen. It will also build on current positive practice around modern slavery, child sexual exploitation (CSE) and youth violence to enhance what works and improve local practice; this will extend work with schools, enhance the role of communities and deliver training for frontline practitioners.



*This strategy was developed with the full endorsement of the constituent members of Safer Wolverhampton Partnership, Wolverhampton Safeguarding Adults Board and Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board.*

Wolverhampton Safeguarding Boards: <https://www.wolverhamptonsafeguarding.org.uk/>

Safer Wolverhampton Partnership: <http://www.saferwolverhampton.org.uk/index.html>

# Executive Summary

## Partnership Vision

Working together to strengthen the visibility, early identification and partnership response to prevent violence, reducing the risk of exploitation and its associated harms.

## Rationale for change

Most young people in Wolverhampton live positive lives and go on to make positive contributions to their communities and the city. Some young people are however vulnerable to violence and exploitation in various forms.

To ensure that all residents are protected, Wolverhampton has taken the bold step of adopting a more encompassing commitment to tackling violence and exploitation in whatever guise it presents. The aim of this strategy is to move away from thematic and siloed working practices by adopting a public health approach to deal with violence and exploitation in its entirety and achieve change at a population level.

## Exploitation - what's in scope<sup>2</sup>

- Modern Slavery and trafficking
- Gangs and youth violence
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Child Criminal Exploitation

## Outcomes

- Strengthened knowledge and understanding of professionals to better identify those at risk
- Reduction in young people becoming involved in violence
- Improved integrated support pathways out of violence and exploitation
- Reduced harm to families and increased community resilience and awareness
- Improved information flow and use between agencies and communities
- Increased targeted intervention to protect people from violence and exploitation
- Reduce the level of risk and exploitation of young people
- Robust enforcement to tackle OCGs
- Strengthened and supportive offender management

<sup>2</sup> *Interpersonal violence, including domestic abuse is outside the scope of this strategy. Instead it is covered within the city's Interpersonal Violence and Abuse Strategy.*

# Partnership Vision

**Working together to strengthen the visibility, early identification and partnership response to prevent violence, reducing the risk of exploitation and its associated harms.**

## Introduction

### National Picture

The nature of offending behaviour is changing; there is more evident exploitation of adults and young people from county lines<sup>3</sup> activity, the majority of which is linked to drugs, but not all linked to gangs. Whilst youth violence overall has fallen, there has been an increase in youth violence involving weapons and knives in particular; this is in line with the regional and local picture.

The launch of the government's Serious Violence Strategy<sup>4</sup> in April 2018 provides a helpful context for Wolverhampton's approach. Striking a balance between enforcement action, early intervention to tackle root causes of violence and a strengthened partnership response. The key themes of the strategy are;

- Tackling county lines and misuse of drugs
- Early intervention and prevention
- Supporting communities and partnerships
- Effective law enforcement and criminal justice response

To inform a local approach, guidance from the Modern Slavery Act 2015 has also been considered. The current National Referral Mechanism (NRM) which supports victims of trafficking and modern slavery is under review by the Home Office and as such our approach to dealing with this particular strand of exploitation will adapt to mirror any changes to the process.

The government provide a CSE definition guide for practitioners which helps to inform practice and provide best practice examples for all professionals to work against.

More recently, in February 2019 the Children's Commissioner published a report titled 'Keeping Kids Safe'<sup>5</sup>. The report argues for a paradigm change in thinking, which stops treating children involved with gangs and youth violence as criminals responsible for their own situation and instead sets out to protect them.

### Regional Picture

Regionally there are a number of strategic boards with an interest in tackling violence and exploitation; a joined-up commitment to how this will look for the West Midlands is currently being developed. The evident growth in awareness around issues such as county lines, modern slavery (MS) and the associated grooming and exploitation by OCGs whose operations span geographic boundaries has raised the profile of these issues. There is a clear willingness from key partners to work collaboratively, share learning and coordinate the regional response.

Wolverhampton are assisting in the growing support for developing a Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) for the West Midlands. Learning has been taken from Scotland, who have successfully introduced a VRU which adopts a

<sup>3</sup> County lines are telephone lines which Organised Crime Groups (OCGs) use to sell and arrange delivery of drugs up and down the country. Typical county lines activity involves OCGs and/or criminal networks exploiting younger individuals from large urban areas to travel to smaller locations such as a county or coastal town – to either deliver or sell drugs and/or money.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-strategy>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/keeping-kids-safe/>

'public health approach' focussing on limiting the impact of short term issues, whilst addressing the root causes in the longer term (e.g. poverty, inequalities). This approach would help ensure a coordinated, evidence based 'public health' approach across the West Midlands with a potential for a longer term commitment to resources.

### Local Picture

Wolverhampton's commitment to a more encompassing approach to addressing violence and exploitation in the city builds on positive work already taken to embed the response to CSE and gangs/youth violence through statutory services. The role of third sector partners in providing specialist interventions is acknowledged and valued in the city. It is recognised that the cross-cutting exploitation of adults/young people requires a more flexible, joined up strategic model which moves away from the traditional 'themed' approach to these issues. Previously separate strategies have focused on distinct individual issues which are encompassed within the violence and exploitation agenda. This revised partnership response will therefore focus on addressing violence and exploitation in whatever guise, incorporating MS/trafficking, CSE, gangs/youth violence and child criminal exploitation (CCE). A review of operational governance is underway to ensure structures are geared up for tackling these more complex vulnerabilities in their entirety .



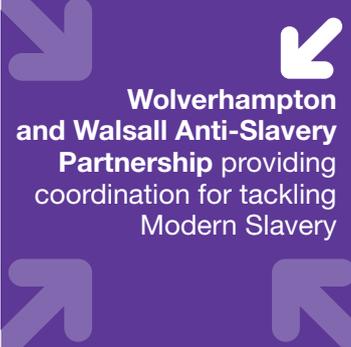
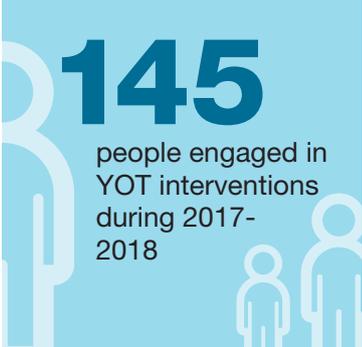
A greater focus will also be placed on tackling the OCGs which perpetrate these crimes; drugs, money, power and control are key drivers for OCG activity. Whilst OCGs operating within the city will rightly be a key focus, their activities often permeate outside the city's boundary and require joint working with partners in neighbouring authorities as well as regional and transport enforcement agencies.

The city is open to learning from other parts of the UK, such as Scotland, Manchester and parts of London where public health approaches to knife crime have shown promise. These will assist the delivery of long-term interventions at a population level and the adoption of contextual safeguarding models<sup>6</sup>. Building on the work of the city's joint working protocol, which sets out arrangements for coordinated planning across the city's strategic boards, joint governance of this strategy lies between Safer Wolverhampton Partnership, Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children Board and Wolverhampton Safeguarding Adults Boards. This will strengthen the city's overall approach to preventing, identifying, and responding to issues of violence and exploitation.

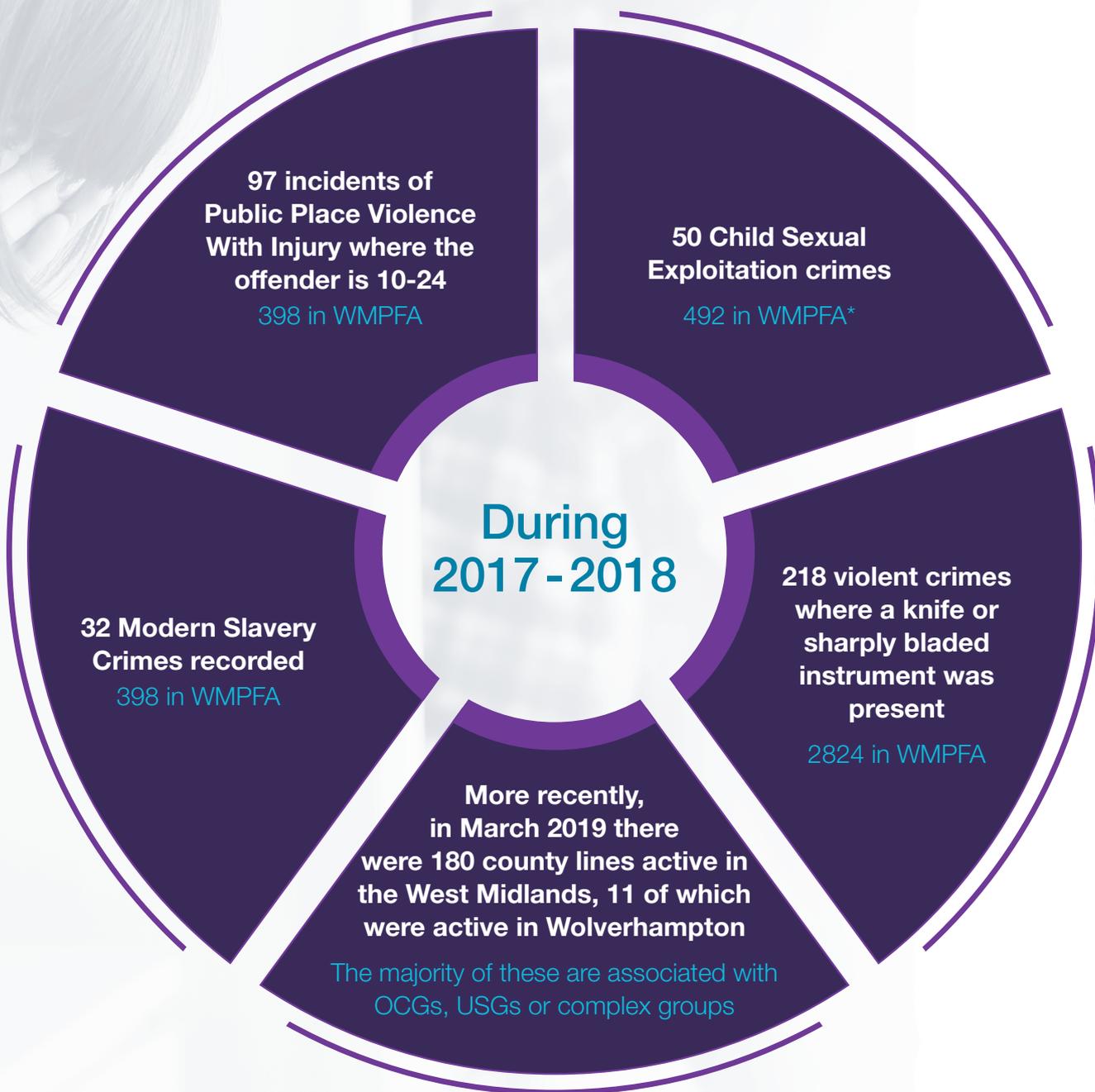
<sup>6</sup> Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse.

# Reducing Violence and Exploitation Successes 2017-2018

Partners across the city have worked to address issues linked to violence and exploitation and to strengthen the city's response. Some of the successes are celebrated below.

<p><b>Girls Allowed</b> Project aimed at young females associated with or vulnerable to gang involvement</p> 	<p>Third Sector partners commissioned to deliver specialist interventions in <b>specifically identified locations</b> for those <b>vulnerable to violence and exploitation</b></p> 	<p><b>Critical call-out mediation service deployed</b> to provide reassurance and ensure cohesion at times of increased gang and youth violence</p> 
<p>Reported <b>modern slavery offences</b> increased by <b>300%</b>, suggesting increased confidence to report  <i>(8 offences in 2016-2017 to 32 offences during 2017-2018)</i></p> 	<p>Primary School mentoring programme trains young people to become mentors.  <b>Aim - to build resilience and confidence</b></p> 	<p><b>Wolverhampton and Walsall Anti-Slavery Partnership</b> providing coordination for tackling Modern Slavery</p> 
<p><b>145</b> people engaged in YOT interventions during 2017-2018</p> 	<p><b>10 WEEK INTERVENTION PROGRAMME</b> working with families whose children are involved in gangs and violence</p> 	<p>Development of a <b>Modern Slavery pathway</b>, allowing timely referrals from practitioners and support for victims</p> 
<p><b>City-wide roll-out of modern slavery training packages</b> targeted communication and intelligence gathering</p>	<p><b>FOUR KNIFE BINS</b> in Wolverhampton where weapons can be disposed of without fear of repercussions</p> 	<p><b>175</b> young people took part in <b>Community Resolution Workshops</b> at The Way Youth Zone during 2017-2018</p>

# What do we know about violence and exploitation in Wolverhampton?



<sup>7</sup> Data provided by West Midlands Police.

\* West Midlands Police Force Area

Wolverhampton is adopting a more encompassing commitment to tackling violence and exploitation in whatever guise it presents. Recognising that violence and exploitation are cross cutting issues; this strategy moves away from dealing with thematic and siloed working practices by adopting a public health approach to deal with violence and exploitation holistically and in it's entirety.

It is important that everybody involved in driving forward this changed approach understand how work in different areas of violence and exploitation can contribute to achieving the strategy outcomes.

## Child Sexual Exploitation

**Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) 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<sup>8</sup>.**

Often a victim is groomed into believing that their abuser cares for them. Children at risk are likely to be coerced, forced or intimidated using emotional or physical abuse to participate in sexual acts. Often victims are not aware that they are being abused.

The number of young people reported as being at risk of or involved in CSE has increased. The increase in reporting can in part be attributed to improvements in training and professional development of practitioners to better identify risk and intervene at an earlier point.



<sup>8</sup> DfE (2017) 'Child Sexual Exploitation' Department of Education Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/591903/CSE\\_Guidance\\_Core\\_Document\\_13.02.2017.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591903/CSE_Guidance_Core_Document_13.02.2017.pdf)

## Child Criminal Exploitation

**Child Criminal exploitation (CCE) is common in county lines and occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or a young person under the age of 18. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears to be consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact it can also occur using technology<sup>9</sup>.**

Criminal exploitation of children and young people is broader than just county lines and includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or commit theft.

Many children and young people will not recognise that they are being exploited or coerced and that they are at risk. They may believe they are in control of the situation and can leave at any time, when in fact the opposite is true. Those who have been exploited by criminals may also be at risk of becoming involved in county lines.



<sup>9</sup> United Nation Human Rights (2018) Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocoltraffickinginpersons.aspx>



## Modern Slavery and Trafficking

**"Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.<sup>10</sup>**

Modern slavery is an umbrella term which encompasses slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking.

Wolverhampton Anti-Slavery Partnership (WASP) provides specialist provision and coordination for tackling modern slavery which includes city-wide roll out of modern slavery training packages, targeted communication and intelligence gathering.

A train the trainer programme has been made available across all sectors.

A modern slavery pathway has been developed within Wolverhampton, which allows practitioners to make timely referrals and signpost victims ensuring that they receive the individual support required. Although reports of these crimes are relatively few, their nature means they are largely hidden, therefore more work is needed to raise awareness about the types of exploitation being perpetrated within communities.

<sup>10</sup> United Nation Human Rights (2018) Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/protocoltraffickinginpersons.aspx>

# Gangs and Youth Violence

**A relatively durable, predominantly street based group of young people who:**

- **See themselves (and are often seen by others) as a discernible group**
- **Engage in criminal activity and violence**
- **Lay claim over territory (this is not only geographical territory but can include an illegal economy territory)**
- **Have some form of identifying structural feature**
- **Are in conflict with other similar gangs<sup>11</sup>.**

“Youth” is defined as a person between the ages of 0-24 years, within which there are three recognised groups:

- under 10 years - children below the age of criminal responsibility
- 10-17 years - children and young people above the age of criminal responsibility
- 18-24 years - young adults

During 2017-2018, Wolverhampton’s youth violence accounted for 35.61% of the City’s total violence; this is in line with the wider West Midlands area, which stood at 35.60%.

During the same period Wolverhampton saw a 4% increase in youth violence when compared with the previous year. Knives in particular have been the most frequently used and carried

weapon. Whilst this increase is lower than that experienced across the wider West Midlands, which saw an increase of 14.2% during the same period, the majority of knife offences were committed by young people aged between 10-17 years old which is of concern.

It is recognised that those young people involved in gangs and/or youth violence can be vulnerable to exploitation and may be at risk of being coerced into county lines. Young victims and perpetrators of youth violence are often interchangeable.

Professionals across sectors, work in partnership to address these issues and deliver a range of preventative measures supported by police activity.

<sup>11</sup> The Centre for Social Justice (2009) ‘Breakthrough Britain: Dying to belong’ Available at; <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/library/dying-belong-depth-review-street-gangs-britain>

# Violence and Exploitation Strategic Outcomes

Priorities and outcomes included in the strategy have been informed by local need, data from partner agencies, analysis of data trends and extensive consultation with partners, residents and communities across the city.



## Early Areas of Focus

To achieve the strategic outcomes, activities will initially focus on the key areas below:

Develop a communication plan, including social media platforms, to engage with communities and build knowledge and understanding around the risks of exploitation

Early identification of those at risk of becoming victims and offenders

Provide targeted outreach support, including long-term sustainable activities to deter young people from exploitation

Strengthen business sector response to exploitation

Facilitate cross-boundary coordination, information sharing and consistency of practice

Improved targeting of intensive family support

Develop a structured and targeted training programme and resources for professionals to improve frontline safeguarding response

Investigate the effects of developmental trauma, attachment issues and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) to better understand causal factors

Strengthening our relationship with education settings and extend education-based delivery

Develop arrangements to identify, disrupt and dismantle OCGs

Embed a consistent referral mechanism with clear pathways

Facilitate a stakeholder event to clearly communicate Wolverhampton's ambition and secure necessary cross-sector support

Coordinate targeted interventions to reduce knife crime prevalence

Improved systems for data capture

## Recognising Increased Risk

There are several factors which increase the risk of exploitation.

Criminals and gangs often target vulnerable people as they are easier to coerce and groom. Young people who frequently go missing may have a higher propensity to become involved in county lines for example and require the correct support to protect them and reduce their vulnerability.

Children who are living in care and those excluded from school or on modified timetables are at increased risk of both victimisation and perpetration of violence and exploitation. Chaotic lifestyles, low self-esteem and the need for acceptance are contributing factors for young people to be drawn into exploitive relationships. These feelings and needs are used by exploiters to groom vulnerable individuals.

Identified risk factors	Identified pull factors	Protective factors
Having prior experience of neglect, physical or sexual abuse	Peer acceptance/ belonging	Support with ACEs
Lack of stable home environment / insecure accommodation status / rough sleeping	Financial rewards, gifts and/or alcohol	Stable accommodation and home environment
Domestic violence, substance misuse, mental health issues	Glamorisation	Support with substance misuse or mental health issues
Social isolation	Love / relationships	Stable, loving relationships
Economic vulnerability	Security / protection	Employment or training
Having physical or learning disability	Popularity	Presence of guardian-style adults
Persistently going missing from home/care	Accommodation (without rules)	Positive social engagements / belonging
Disengaged or excluded from education, training and employment	Financial rewards / feeling of purpose	Attending an education setting
Being in public care (particularly those in residential)	Love / relationships	Positive role models / mentors

# Governance and Delivery

The strategy outcomes will be delivered using the 4 P model. The model allows the causes and consequences of violence and exploitation to be tackled by preventing and protecting those at risk, empowering individuals and communities to become more resilient, and actively pursuing those who cause the most harm.

## The Four P Model

### 1. Prevent

Identify individuals who are vulnerable to being exploited and/or involved in violence; ensure that they and their families receive the help and support required to prevent further harm.

### 2. Protect

Extend the roles of communities in tackling V&E and reduce the fear of crime.

### 3. Prepare

Strengthen resilience of victims and communities to mitigate the harm caused by violence and exploitation. Raise awareness of risks through active communication and training.

### 4. Pursue

Progress enforcement action against those involved in violence and exploitation; effective management of those involved in medium-high risk offending and deter those involved in lower level criminality.

A performance framework will underpin the strategy and ensure implementation against the strategic outcomes. A delivery plan will set out key actions and monitor progress, requiring commitment from partners to ensure successful delivery against objectives. The plan will be refreshed annually to reflect any changes in local need and priorities.

## Governance

The operational governance structures have historically been thematic groups. These structures are subject to change following the completion of a review of the current arrangements. These local arrangements work alongside regional groups which Wolverhampton are actively engaged with. Due to the complex nature of the issues this strategy will address, governance will be held jointly between Wolverhampton Adults and Children Safeguarding Boards and the Safer Wolverhampton Partnership.

## Equalities

A full equality analysis has been completed to inform our approach and will be kept under review to revise delivery as required. Some main findings from the equalities analysis include:

- Young men are most likely to be perpetrators of violence
- Victims of CSE are predominantly female and perpetrators male
- Those with a learning disability or vulnerability are particularly susceptible to exploitation.

The strategy acknowledges other factors which can increase somebody's risk of serious violence and exploitation, these include insecure accommodation status, substance misuse issues, mental ill-health, social isolation, economic vulnerability, children and young people in care and those without or disengaged in education or employment.

Tailored support and interventions must be targeted towards those most at-risk, including the groups outlined above whilst also providing universal services.

When considering the development of the strategy, consultations were held with a wide cross section of the community, those involved in the consultation process included; members of the general public, community leaders, voluntary and community sector groups as well as statutory services. A number of structured questions were asked to ensure that the process captured a comprehensive response from those consulted.



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