



Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

16 April 2024 at 18.00

**Meeting Venue: Conference Room 2 at the Council House, Lichfield Street,
Walsall**

[Livestream Link](#)

Membership:

Councillor A. Hicken (Chair)
Councillor T. Jukes (Vice-Chair)
Councillor A. Garcha
Councillor L. Harrison
Councillor N. Latham
Councillor S. Nasreen
Councillor A. Nawaz
Councillor W. Rasab
Councillor L. Rattigan
Councillor C. Statham
Councillor J. Whitehouse

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor S. Elson – Children's Services

Quorum:

Four Members

The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012
Specified pecuniary interests

The pecuniary interests which are specified for the purposes of Chapter 7 of Part 1 of the Localism Act 2011 are the interests specified in the second column of the following:

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	<p>Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by a member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of a member.</p> <p>This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Regulations (Consolidation) Act 1992.</p>
Contracts	<p>Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority:</p> <p>(a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and</p> <p>(b) which has not been fully discharged.</p>
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	<p>Any tenancy where (to a member's knowledge):</p> <p>(a) the landlord is the relevant authority;</p> <p>(b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.</p>
Securities	<p>Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where:</p> <p>(a) that body (to a member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and</p> <p>(b) either:</p> <p>(i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or</p> <p>(ii) if the share capital of that body is more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.</p>

Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972 (as amended)

Access to information: Exempt information

Part 1

Descriptions of exempt information: England

1. Information relating to any individual.
2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
4. Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5. Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6. Information which reveals that the authority proposes:
 - (a) to give any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or
 - (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.
8. Information being disclosed during a meeting of a Scrutiny and Performance Panel when considering flood risk management functions which:
 - (a) Constitutes a trades secret;
 - (b) Its disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person (including the risk management authority);
 - (c) It was obtained by a risk management authority from any other person and its disclosure to the public by the risk management authority would constitute a breach of confidence actionable by that other person.

Part 1 – Public Session

1. **Apologies**
2. **Substitutions**
To receive notice of any substitutions for a Member of the Committee for the duration of the meeting.
3. **Minutes**
To approve and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2024.
(To Follow)
4. **Declarations of Interest**
5. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended):**
To agree that the public be excluded from the private session during consideration of the agenda items indicated for the reasons shown on the agenda.
6. **Children at Risk of Exploitation**
To provide an update in respect of Walsall's arrangements and work completed to support Children and Young People that may be at risk of exploitation.
(Enclosed – Pages 5 - 38)
7. **Child Sexual Abuse within the Family Environment**
The first annual report outlining previous and current partnership activity relating to tackling Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment in Walsall.
(Enclosed – Pages 39 -50)
8. **Recommendation Tracker**
To review progress with recommendations from previous meetings.
(Enclosed – Pages 51)
9. **Areas of Focus 2023/24**
To review the Committee Work Programme and the Forward Plans for Walsall Council and the Black Country Executive Committee
(Enclosed – Page 52 - 66)
10. **Date of next meeting**
To be confirmed at Annual Council.

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
16th April 2024

Agenda Item No.

Children at Risk of Exploitation

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr Stacie Elson - Children's Portfolio Holder

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update in respect of Walsall's arrangements and work completed to support Children and Young People that may be at risk of exploitation over the last 12 months. The issue of Child Exploitation remains a core and significant component of activity and leadership focus of Walsall Council, the Local Safeguarding Partnership and Community Safety Partnership.

Child Exploitation (CE) is a term with a broad definition. It includes Child Sexual Exploitation, Child Criminal Exploitation, County Lines, Modern Slavery and Trafficking. Local Authorities have overarching responsibility for safeguarding all children in their area. Their statutory functions under the 1989 and 2004 Children Act(s) 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).

Local agencies, including police and health services, also have a duty under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 to ensure they consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people when carrying out their functions.

Reason for scrutiny:

This is an annual updating report outlining previous and current partnership activity relating to tackling Child Exploitation here in Walsall. This report aims to provide assurances and updates of the work that has taken place across the partnership since last presented to this committee in April 2023.

Recommendations:

To note and support the current plans in regard to the work being undertaken here in Walsall to safeguarding children at risk of exploitation.

Background papers:

Child exploitation is a continued concern across the country and both government and local authorities have seen the impact that exploitation has had on its children. Through research there have been lessons learnt and so local authorities now have a better understanding of how all forms of exploitation links to other behaviours which put children at risk of exploitative harm.

Previous reports in regard to Walsall's arrangements to safeguard our children exploitation have been presented to this committee annually and in line with safeguarding partnership processes.

There have been a number of regional and national reports published since Alexis Jay's Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham was published in August 2014. Since that time, the focus of what constitutes Child Exploitation has shifted and professionals working in this arena are now more educated as to its impact and how partners should work together in an attempt to reduce any risk within their communities.

In addition, Professor Alexis Jay has recently published (October 2022) her final report from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. This outlines a number of key findings from a range of reports in regard to extra familial and intra familial sexual harm over the last 7 years. The most recent report specifically looking at Child Sexual Exploitation was published in February 2022 and outlined the findings of exploitation by organised networks. This review focussed on 6 case study areas and undertook a detailed analysis of information held by agencies to better understand the experiences and responses to children who were currently being, or had been, sexually exploited by organised networks.

The Government provided a response to the final report of the Independent Inquiry into Sexual Abuse in May 2023, accepting the need to act on all but one of the inquiry's recommendations, committing to an extensive programme of work across the recommendations which they felt would deliver real change for the future. The response went on to outline what actions were proposed by the Government across each of the recommendations, with reference to the voice of victims and survivors remaining at the heart of all of their work.

As with all regional and national research findings, we cross reference all key recommendations with the work of Walsall Safeguarding Partnership as an assurance and potential learning opportunity.

Resource and legal considerations:

Responding to children at risk of significant harm is a statutory duty placed on Local Authority Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, Strategic Partnership Chairs and senior managers within organisations who commission and provide services for children and families. The resources required to respond to this statutory requirement come from within the existing resources across the partnership of organisations working in Walsall to protect vulnerable children and those at risk of harm.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

One of our corporate priorities is that children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well. We also aim to provide people to have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities. In Walsall, we strive to ensure that communities are prospering and

resilient and that our children are living in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

Citizen impact:

The effective delivery of high quality services to protect children and young people from significant harm, including the risk of child exploitation has a direct impact on the welfare and well-being of children and young people in Walsall. It directly links to the corporate priority to Improve Health and Wellbeing and the Children's Services objective that all children in Walsall, whatever their needs, are safe and supported.

Environmental impact:

Not applicable for this report

Performance management

Protection from abuse is a fundamental right for all children and exploitation is a form of child abuse. Our vision continues to ensure that children, young people and their families whose lives are affected by exploitation will receive a high level of support, protection, and that offenders are held accountable for their actions, and brought to justice.

We continue to collate and track information in regard to exploitation through our exploitation hub and via the use of performance data. This information is also shared regionally with the local Violence Reduction Partnership as part of the regional data set that is accessible to all partners across the region.

Reducing inequalities:

Our Walsall All Age Exploitation Strategy sets out the vision that Walsall Council has to ensure the co-ordinated provision of services designed to address the protection of children and the disruption and prosecution of activities by adults. It provides specific support for those children and young people who are at risk of significant harm, including those with protected characteristics of gender, disability, race and religion.

In line with our corporate priorities, Walsall sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services in order to have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children and young people. Local Authorities, Police and Health Services as key local partners must provide a robust safeguarding approach to ensure they have arrangements in place to provide adequate protection for children at risk of exploitation. The work we continue to do in regard to exploitation continues to be overseen and scrutinised by the key functions of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership business unit.

Consultation:

In order to make sure that all children and young people's voices are heard, we must make sure that appropriate and accessible participation opportunities are available.

This includes ensuring that children and young people have the skills and support they need to take part in a way that works for them and their families. This is outlined within Walsall's Participation Strategy.

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Introduction

The interpersonal harms that young people face beyond their families is now well known and categorised. From peer-on-peer abuse within schools and communities to an increase in domestic abuse amongst young people in intimate relationships and the exploitation of children for sexual and criminal purposes - these harms pose a significant and long-lasting risk to young people's welfare.

The exploitation of children can take a number of different forms and perpetrators may subject children and young people to multiple forms of abuse at the same time, such as criminal exploitation (including county lines) and sexual exploitation. The child exploitation landscape is a complex one with ever-shifting characteristics and challenges for local partnerships. Like most areas nationally, we have seen a significant overlap between children that are potentially being exploited with those that are also involved in, or exposed to, serious youth violence. Youth Violence is a term often used to describe the threat, physical injury and harm caused to children and young people from violence outside of the home.

As offending behaviours and the methods of exploitation of young people changes, so does the understanding of what constitutes Youth Violence. In the past five years, there has been a significant change in the nature and extent of those affected, as well as professional understanding of the issues and of what works to reduce its harm. Our focus on contextual harm and how we safeguard against this alongside our work in relation to exploitation will be further explored within coming months to consider a wider adolescent safeguarding offer in Walsall and may change the way in which we focus our resources and devise new pathways that may be required to better support our young people at risk or have complex needs.

Every year, thousands of children in the UK are exploited. Some have been groomed into county lines drug trafficking, others face sexual abuse from within their own community. Although the forms of exploitation may often change, the methods these adults use to target and exploit children largely stay the same. This includes supplying them with alcohol and/or drugs, befriending them and providing them with money/gifts. This is known as 'grooming' and it is used for both criminal and sexual exploitation. For some time now, the term 'Contextual Safeguarding' has been used to describe 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 within their communities, schools and online can feature violence and abuse and we here in Walsall are no different from other areas that are trying to adapt our work to ensure that our approaches remain current and in line with the needs of our community.

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. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. This is often seen when the young person being exploited believe that they are in a relationship with the perpetrator. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact as this can also occur through the use of technology. Over recent years there has

been an increase in peer-on-peer abuse with the use of social media platforms aiding in the overall exploitation of one young person to another.

Child criminal exploitation is not defined in law, though the government's Serious Violence Strategy defines it as occurring 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. It is in this context that we are seeing a larger number of young people potentially being exploited as part of the increase of serious youth violence across the region.

The vast majority of children and young people grow up safely in Walsall. However, a minority of children and young people face significant risks from exploitation and/or serious youth violence. Much progress has been made in Walsall in recent years in recognising and responding to the needs of our young people but there is a growing need to tackle violence and exploitation holistically, with consistent, evidence-based interventions which avoid fragmented, crisis-driven responses. The governance arrangements reflect the importance of a joined up approach between community safety and child safeguarding agencies and as such the partnership arrangements in place are robustly scrutinised here in Walsall.

The exploitation of children cannot be addressed by a single agency working alone. Effective collaboration between partners is essential to the protection of children and ultimately in stopping offenders. There is a wide range of behaviours and scenarios that may not initially appear related to child sexual or criminal exploitation, but pieced together and put into context, form a bigger picture. This is why we hold daily triage conversations within our hub to ensure that those pieces of the jigsaw are put together to inform us of what actions may be required to safeguard those at risk and disrupt any potential exploitation from happening in the future. Any themes/patterns that emerge are routinely discussed in our monthly Exploitation Panel and the work of this is then overseen by the Exploitation Sub Group and the wider safeguarding partnership.

Local Response – what we do here in Walsall

Exploitation Strategy

Since 2019, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership and the Safer Walsall Partnership, have had an All Age Exploitation approach as part of our All Age Strategy to tackling Exploitation. The governance of this approach continues to be managed through the Exploitation Sub Group and operationally through the Exploitation Panel with operational oversight taking place through the joint adults and children's delivery group. All of these are multi agency meetings with members from Childrens and Adults Social Care, Education, Community Safety and Enforcement, Youth Justice Service, West Midlands Police, Health, Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust and voluntary organisations such as Street Teams.

The Safeguarding Partnership Business Unit, supported in undertaking a review of all-age exploitation between February 2023 and May 2023, in consultation with partners.

An updated strategic needs assessment was agreed and commissioned, which commenced in December 2023 by Professor Helen Lowey and this will take a public health approach. The strategic needs assessment is proposed to be completed by May 2024. This will lead to a revised exploitation strategy that is evidenced based through the strategic needs assessment and development of an updated strategic delivery plan that will reshape our focus and strategic objectives over the coming 3 years to tackling exploitation in Walsall and continue to improve outcomes for our children and young people.

Regionally, as one of the seven metropolitan Local Authorities across the West Midlands, we continue to be represented at various forums that feeds into the Regional Strategic Exploitation Framework. The West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership continue to work jointly across the region to provide an overview of exploitation and abuse from across the West Midlands. This is part of the overall public health approach across the region of which our strategy feeds into. In addition, we feed into a regional dataset that is used to cross reference themes/patterns in relation to children missing or at risk of exploitation from across the region. This information is then used to determine what support/resources may be needed in particular areas and how as a collective partnership we can tackle some of the issues from a regional perspective.

Operational response

In Walsall we continue to operate a 'Exploitation Hub' which is a multi-agency approach to identifying, screening, and sharing of intelligence around those at risk of exploitation and ensure that children and young people receive the right help and support at the earliest opportunity and are protected from harm. The hub performance data continues to be shared at the monthly all age exploitation delivery group and monthly exploitation panel, where any emerging themes or trends identified through the hub are reviewed with all partner agencies. We are continuing to strengthen our exploitation panel by enhancing the partnership data and assurance activity that is shared. This supports us as a partnership in understanding the current exploitation landscape in Walsall, demographics of victims and survivors, additional vulnerabilities they may experience, locations that exploitation is taking place and perpetrators of concern. This enables us to take a tactical approach in responding to and disrupting exploitation in Walsall, focusing on the 4 P approach of Prepare, Prevent, Protect and Pursue, ensuring the voice and lived experience of children and young people is at the heart of our intervention to ensures best outcomes.

Walsall's All-Age Exploitation Pathway has been in place since September 2020 and this is well embedded. Exploitation remains a priority area for the Safeguarding Partnership and the pathway was reviewed in May 2023 through consultation with partners to ensure our approach to tackling exploitation in the borough remained effective and to support in identifying key areas of focus and development over the coming year. The hub continues to raise awareness of exploitation and our local pathway across the wider partnership through the exploitation delivery group promoting regular training offers from the Exploitation team, the Safeguarding Partnership and West Midlands Police Violence Reduction Unit, in addition to attending quarterly Education DSL workshops and Early help locality Time to Talk sessions.

The pathway works alongside our MASH and daily partnership exploitation triage discussions promotes effective sharing of information between agencies to ensure children and young people who are exploited or vulnerable to exploitation, receive the right help and support at the earliest opportunity. These discussions continue to include our Vulnerable learners hub, Street Teams, Youth Justice Service, Local Policing Unit Exploitation Police, Locate police, Adult Social Care, and a member of our exploitation team.

In November 2022, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership was subject to a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) of the multi-agency response to identification of initial need and risk in Walsall. This inspection took place from 7 to 11 November 2022 and was carried out by inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).

In their letter to the Safeguarding Partnership on the 6th January 2023, they highlighted that, *'risks to children from sexual or criminal exploitation are recognised well at the front door. The daily Exploitation Triage meeting is a well-attended multi-agency meeting that explores effectively the risks faced by children when they are reported as missing. Information is shared effectively in order to help professionals' understanding of risks and actions, which helps inform decision-making. The chair of the Exploitation Triage meeting rotates between its core members, which is inclusive and indicative of confidence in the commitment and capability of the participants in the meeting. This ensures that responses to child protection are a shared responsibility across all partners' (JTAI inspection report, January 2023).*

We continue to develop our multi-agency exploitation triage and will soon be having a mental health practitioner join us from the Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust which will provide valuable information sharing and support decision making, with their professional knowledge and insight to supporting our children who present with diagnosed and undiagnosed need and increased vulnerability relating to their mental health. In addition, conversations have commenced to look to secure a representative from the Probation service within triage.

Exploitation and Missing Team

Our Exploitation Team continues to be led by our Principal Exploitation Reduction Officer, Katie Storer-Young. This is currently a non-case holding team that offers consultation and support in regards to all types of child exploitation including sexual, criminal and children at risk of being trafficked. The Principal Exploitation Reduction Officer has good partnership relationships both locally through the Safeguarding Partnership and regionally, through the regional exploitation forums, keeping up to date with the changing landscape around exploitation, regional themes and trends and information sharing between partners and regional colleagues, which supports in effectively tackling exploitation locally.

The team consists of the following staff:

- 1 x Principle Exploitation Reduction Officer (full time)
- 2 x Exploitation and Missing Coordinators (full time)

- 2 x RHI Missing officers (full time)
- 1 x Specialist Harmful Sexual Behaviour Practitioner (full time)
- 1 x Youth worker (full time seconded)

The Exploitation Team key responsibilities include:

- Is responsible for monitoring and reporting on all aspects of performance around exploitation and children who go missing across all Children's Services and reporting this data to senior managers.
- Holds daily exploitation triage in consultation with external agencies as part of all age exploitation strategy.
- Offers 1:1 support sessions for practitioners and managers to complete exploitation assessments and use of toolkits and to consider/reflect upon potential support and disruption for individual children.
- Will attend and provide information for strategy meetings in regard to high risk children.
- Will attend planning or decision-making meetings where there are indicators of any child being exploited, or going missing.
- Works with all statutory and community partners to prompt and assist joined up working in respect of safeguarding and disruption in Walsall
- Has links to neighbouring authorities and regional forums where Local Authority/external agencies responses to vulnerable children.
- Delivers training and awareness building workshops across children's services and the wider partnership.
- Youth worker provides some direct work with young people who are being exploited or vulnerable to exploitation, this includes activities that support and encourage the young person to voice their wishes and feelings through music, outreach and community based work.
- Collaborates with west midlands VRP and provides support into intensification weeks.

Access to police support via the Exploitation Hub consists of the following officers:

- X1 F/T Sergeant
- X3 F/T PC's and x1 Part time PC
- X1 CSE co-ordinator – part time shared with Wolverhampton
- X1 LOCATE Missing PC – full time
- X1 Vulnerable persons' officer full time (Police staff post)
- X1 Violence co-ordinator full time

Exploitation Hub Triage Data

The following is a breakdown of the referrals of children and adults that have come through exploitation triage between 1st April 2023 and 15th March 2024.

The Exploitation Hub received **416** exploitation assessments during this period. **95** assessments were returned to the referrer as no exploitation had been identified within the assessment. The remaining **321** assessments identified a concern of exploitation and proceeded to partnership screening and discussion within the Exploitation Daily Triage.

Of the **321** exploitation assessments received, this related to **258** individuals that were discussed in the Exploitation Daily Triage. A new exploitation assessment is submitted to the Exploitation Hub for individuals where there is in any change in risk level or any additional information is identified that requires further partnership discussion and decision making.

Of the **258** discussions, **204** of them were for children and **54** for adults over the age of 18.

The exploitation assessment received within the hub for the **258** individual children and adults were screened and discussed within the multi-agency Exploitation Triage and a level of risk agreed, a breakdown of the triage outcomes is shared below:

Assessments where the victim was deemed vulnerable to exploitation: 92.	Assessments where the victim was deemed to have been targeted for potential exploitation: 99.	Assessments where it was clear the victim had been exploited resulting in harm: 67.
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Exploitation Assessments received into the Exploitation Hub, identify different types of exploitation that the individual is experiencing or is vulnerable to. Of the **258** individuals that we received Exploitation Assessments for in this period, the type of exploitation identified is as follows:

Criminal Exploitation	131
Sexual Exploitation	69
Sexual and Criminal Exploitation	25
Youth Violence and Criminal Exploitation	3
Modern Day Slavery	13
Invaded Home (Cuckooing)	3
Online Grooming	12
Financial Exploitation	2

The data shows that the highest type of exploitation identified in Walsall, relates to Criminal Exploitation, with Sexual Exploitation being the second highest referral reason, and for a smaller proportion of individuals there was indication of both criminal and sexual exploitation.

Although this report is in regard to safeguarding our children at risk of exploitation, as we operate an 'all-age exploitation hub', it is worth noting that referrals for adults who are being exploited in Walsall, continues to increase. Within this increase, there are two key themes that have emerged – those of adults being groomed and exploited by local drug dealers who take over their home and sell drugs from the property (previously referred to as 'cuckooing') and those adults who are victims of Modern Slavery. Further work is taking place around these two trends within the exploitation

delivery group and we are currently in the process of developing a robust multi-agency modern slavery pathway.

The referrals leading to assessment came from a number of sources, as listed below:

NHS/Health	5
Adult's Social Care	14
The Beacon	6
Community Safety Protection Team	1
Children's Social Care	110
Early Help	35
Education (Schools and Colleges)	37
Housing	11
Police	14
Probation	1
Street Teams	16
Youth Justice Service	8

Ongoing training and development is offered across the partnership in relation to exploitation to support partners in identifying and responding to need at the earliest opportunity, and increasing awareness and understanding of the referral pathways when exploitation is identified.

Community work

Over the last 12 months, a significant amount of community work has been undertaken by the Missing Children and Exploitation Team. This work has continued to develop on previous successes working directly with children and families and growing multi-agency knowledge and understanding around the issues of contextual safeguarding.

Over the last twelve months, a youth worker within the exploitation hub has led on work within the Mossley area, working with a proactive group of residents around the issue of gangs and exploitation. The group has grown to become self sufficient and has set up as a Community Interest Company, applying for local funding to support children and families and to deliver youth work type of interventions to support young people.

The Exploitation Hub has also extended its work within schools offering support to parents in parent and carer workshops raising awareness of exploitation, signs to look out for and what to do if they have any worries their child may be vulnerable or at risk of exploitation. In addition, this work has included awareness building around missing young people and what to do to prevent missing episodes and how to respond if their child goes missing.

The team continues to support children with positive engagement, and over the last 12 months, one the exploitation hub youth workers has been working with Bay 10 Studios to support young boys and men around the issue of criminal exploitation, young people have written, produced and performed new material reflecting on their

experiences within their local areas. There has been a focus on reflective work, particularly around mental health and how this is impacted by grooming and control by adults around them.

The team has also continued to offer detached outreach work in partnership with Street Teams, Youth Connect and EYES, targeting locations that have been high risk for children, including transport hubs, high footfall spaces and shopping centres. This work has supported additional work to grow within the community safety teams within the council.

Internally the team have grown relationships with council colleagues from the community safety protection teams to highlight areas of concern within the Town Centre and outer borough areas. Targeted pieces of work have taken place to secure buildings and locations where children have been known to be targeted by groomers. This work continues to grow and has been supported by local parents and community protection officers.

Along with this community driven work, training has been offered to taxi drivers who have applied for licences within the council. Licencing officers have supported this work and work is ongoing to develop this further.

Training has been offered to DSL leads throughout the borough to support their understanding of what is happening within the local area and to support the identification of children within educational settings. This has shown dividend with a higher number of educational referrals into the hub over the last twelve months. This work will continue through into the next year.

Working with parents

In addition to our continued community work, working in partnership with parents and carers remains a priority and we continue to increase our offer of support. There is a joint work offer with social workers to support the whole family approach where exploitation has been identified. Families are experts into their own lives and know their children better than any professional, therefore their support and ability to engage in the safety planning is crucial to the success of any intervention. Our work with parents is based on the relational based practice model shared by the Iveson Trust (formally PACE).

The exploitation team will also support parents reporting concerns to police, understanding and identifying potential risk and reporting children as missing when necessary. Our support may also include linking with other partner agencies such as housing as some of our parents have needed to be provided with alternative accommodation when risks to children and their families have become high. For parents, having a child groomed for exploitation can be incredibly traumatic and the team look at what additional support they may need that can ensure they are supported in keeping their children safe within their own community.

Parents are regularly consulted with as part of the work of the Exploitation Pilot Social Care Team and positive feedback has continued to be received over the last 12 months, with parents sharing they felt listened to, involved and supported during the

assessment, safety planning and intervention, and felt there had been positive outcomes for their children.

Cross border work

It is recognised that the exploitation of children does not stop at Walsall's geographical boundaries. Many of the most vulnerable children in the borough are those children who are in care and some high-risk children may have been moved into homes in the Walsall area from other local authority areas. As part of our MASH arrangements at the front door, we have a well-established cross boarder social care network to ensure that safeguarding information is shared and updated when children from other local areas go missing. The Exploitation team work with LOCATE police colleagues to understand the risk in terms of exploitation for these children and young people and we recognise that children in care are potentially more vulnerable to exploitation given their lived experiences. The team have positive working relationships with local authority exploitation hubs across the region and work in partnership when considering risk of exploitation, disruption activity and safety planning for children and young people who move cross border, with a number of positive examples of collaborative cross boarder safeguarding work being seen. In addition, the team work with regional colleagues and colleagues from the regional VRP team to share information, learning and consider best practice. Some of this work informed our work during county lines week and national exploitation day and supports our forward planning. We recognise that children do not see physical boundaries to areas in the same way that professionals do and so information sharing to other teams is significantly important to the work we do.

Children missing from home/care

The team continues to have direct contact with children who have been missing and all children are offered and/or are visited after a missing episode, usually within 72 hours of the episode. The missing worker completes return home conversations with the children and young people looking at the reasons why they were missing, provides a chance for them to talk about what happened whilst they were away and how they may be feeling now that they have returned. Whilst all children are offered this opportunity immediately once they return, not all may wish to receive it but the option to do so at a later date is available should they choose to do so.

We know that when children are missing from their homes, the risk to their health and wellbeing is extremely high and the need to locate them and ensure their safety is our main function. The team have two full time dedicated missing children's workers, offering direct face to face one to one discussions when a child goes missing. This work continues to develop, and we offer additional sessions when a vulnerable child will potentially go missing again. This isn't a statutory obligation, but an addition so that workers are able to support children when they are at their most vulnerable. This work also allows workers to make any additional referrals that may be needed for that child or family as a way of disrupting the pattern of missing episodes. This element of our work is new and is an extension of our focus on prevention.

Walsall Children's Social Care, along with the other 6 Local Authorities in the region, are working in partnership with West Midlands Police to adopt the Philomena Protocol,

which is designed to provide the Police with accurate and up to date information about a child who has gone missing from care homes and other local authority accommodation and puts emphasis on carer's (residential care home staff, supported accommodation staff and foster carer's) working alongside allocated workers in children's services to identify where a child or young person in their care is likely to go missing. The protocol has been seen to work effectively across other local authority areas in the country and West Midlands police were keen to adopt this locally.

The aim of the Philomena protocol is to:

- To safeguard each child in care or resident in supported accommodation
- To manage risk appropriately in accordance with the needs of the child
- To reduce missing episodes for children
- To minimise unnecessary involvement of police
- To manage demand and support a more effective service overall
- To develop understanding of the joint responsibility held by care givers and local police
- To ensure that our joint response is sustainable and that emerging best practice is identified and appropriately developed

A profile pack will be completed by the care provider when a new child is placed with them. The information will support the care provider, should the child go missing, in making efforts to locate them, by understanding their networks and relationships. In addition, it supports them in identifying any possible risk that would require police support in locating them, and in supporting preventative work and reduction in further missing episodes. It will also support in reducing the number of missing notifications for children who have not returned for planned curfew time but their whereabouts have been known and there are no identified safeguarding concerns, allowing police more capacity to focus on the missing episodes of children and young people where we have concerns about their safety and wellbeing whilst missing. For those children who are missing, the profile pack information will support with trying to locate them safely and timely, with any potential risk to the young person whilst missing being evident within the profile pack.

Walsall Exploitation Pilot Team

It was previously shared in Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2023, that we had strengthened our response to children at risk of exploitation with the launch of the Exploitation Pilot Team in October 2022. This was a 12 month programme that focussed on delivering bespoke packages of support to individual children that are being identified and selected through exploitation triage. The team consists of a consultant social worker and 2 social workers, a youth worker and links in with key partners such as health, police, education and the youth justice service. The team has case holding responsibility for up to 20 young people deemed as medium risk of exploitation and sits alongside the wider work that continues within our Exploitation service.

As this was a pilot project, we did not make any changes to the current Safeguarding Partnership Exploitation Pathway. However, the pilot is being used to test whether a case-holding model is the way forward for us in Walsall and whether we should ultimately move towards a permanent multi-agency co located team in the future. In

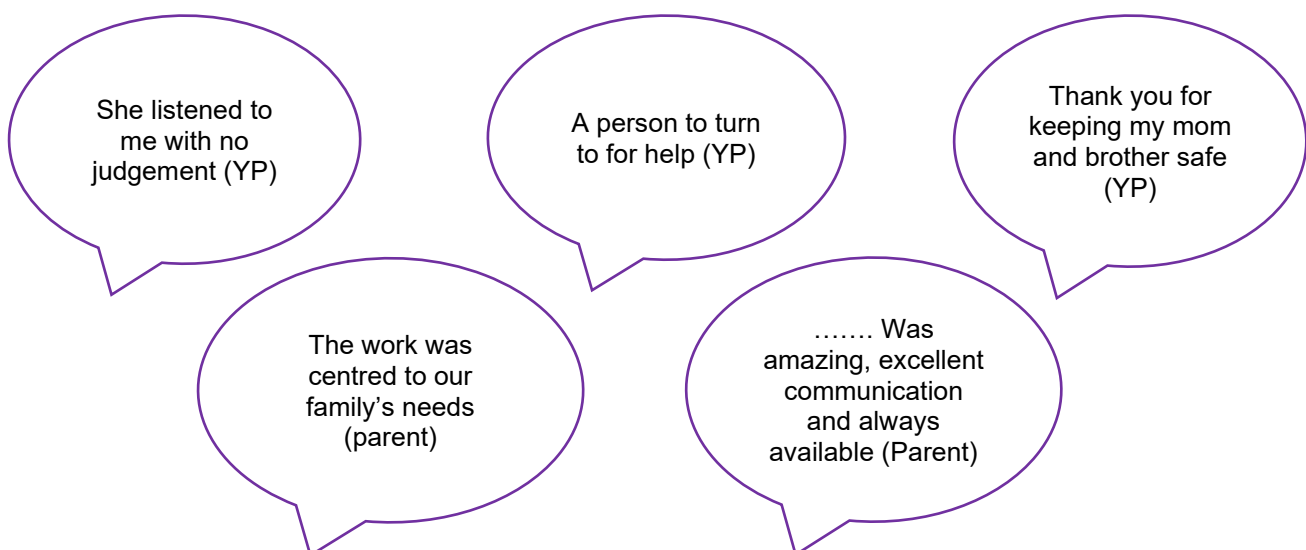
order to do this, management information and performance indicators are being collected throughout the term of the pilot in line with the KPI framework and evaluation that has been specifically devised. All children from the pilot are being individually audited as well as 20 comparable children from the wider service that are being supported via the usual route.

The Key Performance Indicators for the pilot are to:

- Reduce the number of missing episodes (if applicable)
- Providing greater learning experiences either in educational or training settings.
- Reduce level of criminality
- Reduce Exploitation Indicators
- Increase Young People's participation and engagement.

The social workers within the exploitation pilot team have a good understanding of the exploitation landscape in Walsall, being so closely connected with the Exploitation Hub and through having regular presence within daily triage. This ensures they hold up to date knowledge and understanding of exploitation concerns within the area, locations of concern and perpetrators of exploitation that are linked more frequently. This enables them to identify links or additional worries during their direct work with young people and make wider connections when information is shared, that supports their understanding of the individual need or risk to the young person, in addition to increased understanding of the wider exploitation profile in the area, enabling more targeted support and intervention.

The relationships being forged between the young people and their parents/carers within the team is having a positive impact on participation and improved outcomes. The reduced caseload in the team allows the workers within the team to build positive relationships with the young people in order to better understand their circumstances, build the trust and identify the support that they and their family need. Each young person and their family are asked to provide feedback on the support provided which will support in the overall evaluation on the impact of the pilot project. Some examples received to date are as follows:



The pilot has also received positive feedback from practitioners that are working with the children and young people. The pilot adopts some of the principles of the family safeguarding model, utilising motivational interviewing and a strengths-based approach to engaging with children, young people and their families. The use of group supervision has been positive in bringing key practitioners who are supporting the young person together and reflecting on the intervention that is being offered to reduce the risk of exploitation and the impact of this. Practitioners are asked for feedback during the intervention to support the evaluation, some examples of which are:

_____ went above and beyond to build a rapport with the young person and their mother, and to swiftly address and resolve any welfare concerns in relation to the young

I would like to thank _____ for her support in managing our young person who was at high risk of custody be reduced from very high risk to medium in a 6 month time frame. _____'s support and education has enabled this young person to relay his learning and understanding to other young people in school to safeguard them from exploitation. _____ has been extremely reliable and efficient in her work and our young person and family are thankful for this. Our young person has had many social workers throughout their life and I feel _____'s approach through an exploitation route has been able to address and reduce safety and wellbeing concerns. (YJS Practitioner)

A really positive impact – I would say both the young person and their mother felt supported and empowered to participate in the assessment process. This may also have helped to reduce the family's negative view of professionals and make any future interventions easier (YJS practitioner).

Overall, the audit findings to date have been positive and there is indication of positive impact for young people supported through the pilot. There appears to be a greater understanding around the contextual safeguarding concerns of the young people supported through the pilot, and a range of direct work tools used to support safety planning and safety mapping. Engagement from young people and their families within the exploitation pilot team overall is positive and the young person's participation within their child in need planning is positive. Intervention in terms of exploitation is more clearly identified within the young person's social care records for young people open within the pilot. Of the audits completed to date, it is positive that for most young people open within the pilot there has been a decrease in vulnerability or risk, which has included a reduction in criminal activity, reduction in missing episodes, improved school attendance and positive participation in the assessment, plans and intervention. The initial review has seen some very positive outcomes for young people and subsequently it was agreed that the pilot would extend until the summer of 2024 to allow for wider consideration as to what the exploitation offer should look like moving forward, the resource required to be able to increase capacity to work with more young people and considerations to expanding the offer to wider adolescent safeguarding such as serious youth violence and adolescents with complex needs.

Walsall CARE Project

Walsall Council was one of 7 Local Authorities nationally that were successful in securing 1 year funding from DfE for the 'Better Integrated Care Fund' (short breaks innovation funding) for delivery of projects between April 2022 and April 2023. This funding enabled us to deliver the Walsall CARE (community activities reducing exploitation) project, an innovative short-break model specifically for 60 young people aged 11 plus, in academic school year 6 and above who have additional needs, either diagnosed or undiagnosed and who due to their vulnerabilities are at risk of and/or showing early warning signs of low-level exploitation. The objective of the model was to provide positive activities and diversionary support to each young person involved in the project so that they achieve better outcomes and have greater aspirations.

The CARE project sought to deliver a bespoke locally delivered programme of positive activities including sports, arts, cooking/life skills, ICT and other diversionary activities designed to develop positive health, wellbeing, and resilience delivered by the voluntary and community services. Following a procurement exercise 2 local community providers were secured to deliver the pilot programme. This was Street Teams and The Inspire Group.

The CARE project operates in each of the 4 locality areas of Walsall and is shaped around the needs of each area. The programme albeit initially set to support 60 CYP, supported with approval from the DfE 69 Children/young people within the first year of 2022/23 and funding was secured to continue for a further year 2023/24, although at a reduced capacity of 40 children and young people. The service providers deliver weekly activities after school and at the weekend. These programmes engage individual young people in a bespoke programme of activities and mentoring.

Each Young person has access to:

- 1 x after-school club pw (term-time only)
- 1x weekend activity pw (term-time only)
- 121 mentor/trusted adult (throughout the programme)
- HAF programme

The combination of diversionary activities and 1:2:1 mentors provides targeted, bespoke interventions for each child as part of our SEND Local Offer, reducing isolation and increasing understanding of the dangers of exploitation. Referrals are received from schools, GPs, other health professionals, Early Help locality teams, Police and other professionals who may be working with young people, meeting the criteria who have SEND and are at risk of exploitation.

The CARE programme is an evaluated programme with key KPI's and tools used to monitor performance and impact. The end of year report published in September 2023 identified the following impact during year 1 of the programme:

- Exploitation Impact

Impact Missing/risk of exploitation – at the start of the programme 31 young people had been reported as having 'missing episodes', of these 31 young people during their time on the programme:

- 15 young people had no further reported missing episodes.
- 3 reduced their missing episodes significantly (one young person had been reported missing on 16 separate occasions in a 12-month period prior to joining the programme, these reduced by 70%).
- 13 young people continued to have reported missing episodes and their support plans structured around the risks associated, 2 of these young people were stepped up to children's social care with one being supported at CIN and one young person being looked after

- Crime

Prior to joining the programme:

- 15 young people were known to youth justice services.
- 12 of whom were in receipt of youth justice support at the point of CARE intervention, all 12 young people have had no further involvement with youth justice service or escalation within the youth justice system whilst attending CARE programme.
- However, 3 additional young people received youth justice intervention whilst attending CARE.

- School attendance impact

Part of the impact measures school attendance has been tracked for all 69 young people during their time on the programme:

- 61 of the young people were in mainstream education at the time of joining CARE, all remained in school, non-had any fixed term or permanent exclusions.
- 2 young people were in post 16 education and remained in education with no concerns.
- 3 young people were attending the PRU at the start of the programme, at the end of the programme 1 had returned to mainstream education and the other 2 had applied to attend post 16 education.
- 3 young people were missing education (CME) at the start of the programme, as part of the support provided 2 young people now attend alternative education that meet their needs, both are on reduced timetables as part of their transition back into education and to build on their confidence.
- 1 young person remains CME and is receiving additional mental health support as part of the plan to return to a form of education.

It was also noted that of the 69 YP on the programme:

- 40 young people improved their school attendance & educational outcomes from point of referral to point of closure.
- 19 young peoples had a significant increase in school attendance from point of referral to the last academic term, from a dip sample audit it is felt that the increase in attendance has been due to several interventions including increased SEN support, access to alternative education as part of the school week and a positive school placement move.

Of the 29 young people who did not see a significant school attendance increase, again a dip sample audit has been completed the finding of which show the circumstances contributing to low attendance includes:

- Attending school daily however numerous late attendances recorded.
- Reduced timetable or home schooled from mainstream education between 1 – 3 hours per day whilst awaiting named education provider.
- Non school attendance between managed moves / arrangements for alternative education.

- Wellbeing Impact

All young people accessing the CARE project were supported to complete the 'My Mind Outcome Stars', which is strength based, person centred evidenced based tool that measures and supports change around 7 areas of qualitative data:

- Feelings and emotions
- Healthy lifestyles
- Where you live
- Friends and relationship's
- School training and work
- How you use your time
- Self esteem

Through the tracking facility available we are able to evidence the positive well-being impact the programme has had on the young people with a total of 171 Outcome Stars being completed/reviewed with 95% of the young people:

- 85% of young people reported improved feelings and emotions.
- 75% of young people felt they had a healthier lifestyle.
- 87% of young people have improved feelings about where they lived, this was significant improvement compared to a check in point February 2023 when where you live had the lowest overall scoring with 22% reducing scores. At this point work was being completed with the young people to increase the awareness of exploitation and the associated risks, Street Teams delivered awareness sessions to all young people on the project around, criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation & county Lines. The work clearly had an impact on feelings of the area young people lived, work continued around safe relationships, how to stay safe etc that clearly made young people feel safer.
- 76% of young people attending CARE reported having improved friendships and relationships. • 42% said feelings towards school and education had improved.
- 76% of young people attending CARE reported they had improved how they use their time.
- 68% of young people reported improvements in their self-esteem.

As part of the support plan and engagement it was recognised that 21 young people required more intensive mental health support all have been referred to CAMHS and now receiving the right support associated to emotional wellbeing.

The findings of year two of the project will be available after the end of March with the annual evaluation taking place in April/May. Currently we have a total of 55 young people accessing CARE support, 24 young people continued to access CARE provision following from year 1 delivery, with West locality having the highest demand with 27 young people engages in the programme followed by North locality with 13 young people.

So far for 2023/24, we have delivered

- 326 mentoring support sessions
- 151 youth club attendances

Practice Improvement and Quality Assurance

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership introduced the Performance and Quality Assurance Framework in August 2023, which consists of a structured programme of activity, assessment and reporting into the quality and effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements and practice. WSP's Performance and Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is used by all the subgroups in the partnership, including All-Age Exploitation sub group, to provide a consistent, systematic, evidence-based and intelligence informed approach to our work. It is also used as a leadership tool to deliver our responsibilities as strategic managers across the partnership.

All subgroups will use the Performance and Quality Assurance Framework and regularly feed key intelligence and evidence into the Performance and Quality Assurance Subgroups (Children and Adults). This ensures connectivity between the subgroups as this becomes a subset of the quarterly performance dataset/dashboard and assurance activity of the PQA Subgroups which is the central repository of information relating to the effectiveness of our safeguarding arrangements. Key information is triangulated from a range of different sources and subgroups rather than relying on a single means of assessment or source.

The Performance and Quality Assurance Cycle:

Effective performance management and quality assurance is based on a continual process that structures all of the work throughout WSP.

The WSP Performance and Quality Assurance Cycle underpins the framework, includes four key stages of activity (analyse, plan, do and review) with the voices and lived experience of our 4th partners and practitioners at the centre of the process and each stage. Each stage of the cycle and the activities required by partners within subgroups are outlined next.



The Performance and Quality Assurance Cycle

The WSP Performance and Quality Assurance Framework, threads through all of meetings and panels relating to exploitation. The Framework will balance three types of data from a range of sources:

- Quantitative information – This will help to inform **What we do**. It answers the questions: ‘How much/how many?’
- Qualitative information – This will tell us more about **How well we do it**. It is concerned with the functioning of the organisation, the quality of what was done. Are partners working well to respond to safeguarding concerns?
- Outcome information – This tells us **What difference we have made** (through our services, strategies, and interventions) to the lives of children and adults with care and support needs - ‘Is anyone better off.’ Do safeguarding arrangements improve outcomes? Do people feel safer?

As part of the implementation, the WSP performance and quality assurance framework is being used by exploitation subgroup chairs and subgroup members as a leadership tool to provide consistent evidence based and intelligence informed approach to the work undertaken. This is linked to the programme of activity in the performance and quality assurance cycle of analysis, planning, doing and reviewing. Most importantly that the voice and lived experience of children, adults with care and support needs, carers, families and the views of practitioners is central to every stage of activity.

Children’s Social Care Exploitation Month

During January 2024, Children’s Social Care focused our practice improvement and quality assurance activity on Exploitation. This included a range of activities to support professional development and assurance across the service, this included:

- Our monthly child journey audits were themed focusing on children and young people where exploitation was an identified need.

- Our weekly briefs to social care practitioners contained a section focusing on exploitation with different themes each week, this includes child trafficking, National referral mechanism (NRMs), missing children and the proposed launch of the Philomena protocol, FIB partnership information sharing forms, language that cares, in addition to sharing useful links to resources, training opportunities, practice guidance and reflective case studies.
- We developed a voice over presentation on contextual safeguarding assessments and safety planning to be delivered to social care practitioners within their team meetings.
- We shared practitioner guidance around the National Referral Mechanism(NRM) and sourced the facilitation of training to practitioners through Barnados.
- We offered consultation with practitioners to understand what is working well and identify areas of development.
- A number of podcasts and webinars were shared to support practice development.

The learning from our exploitation focused month will be shared within the exploitation delivery group, exploitation panel and exploitation sub group to support with our continued practice development and assurance.

Governance

Walsall's All Age Exploitation Reduction Strategy is governed by the Safer Walsall Partnership overlapping with the Safeguarding Partnership, for which all-age exploitation remains a priority area. The All-Age Exploitation Subgroup continues to be chaired by the Head of Community Safety and Enforcement, Walsall Council and Superintendent, Local Policing, West Midlands Police Chair and is held bi monthly. The Chairs will provide a written report quarterly to both the SLG and Executive Group on the work of the All-Age Subgroup and as part of this reporting by exception escalate issues to these groups. The All-Age Chairs will also receive updates, feedback, and guidance from the Executive Group /SLG to direct and steer the work of the subgroup.

The purpose of the All-Age Exploitation sub-group is to oversee the strategy, prepare and develop the strategic delivery plan, ascertain that there are sufficient resources and policy direction to enable operational lead officers to undertake work to prevent exploitation, protect victims and survivors whilst pursuing offenders using deterrents and disruption. Utilising the Safeguarding Partnership Performance and Quality Assurance Framework, the All-Age Exploitation Sub Group is able to assure itself of the quality and impact of services and intervention and enable continuous improvement. The Exploitation Sub Group provides governance to the panel and delivery groups to enable the objectives of the strategy to be met through the delivery plan and effectiveness to be measured through a range of quality assurance activities.

Exploitation Panel continues to be held monthly to ensure that there is a partnership understanding of risk, threat and harm and to provide a multi-agency coordinated response to safeguard and protect vulnerable children and young people. Themes from exploitation triage, exploitation work and any relevant areas of concerns form the basis of the agreed agenda items and a greater focus on partnership updates has

been included within recent panels which includes strengthening of partnership sharing of data, intel and business insights and partnership assurance activity. There is a focus on ensuring the voice and lived experience of children and young people is captured and is at the heart of all of our work around exploitation. The exploitation panel is also a forum whereby national publications are shared and discussed providing partners with the opportunity to reflect on how any recommendations that may arise from these, can be considered within their respective agencies.

Key focus points of the panel continues to be:

- Raise awareness of exploitation across the partnership
- Discuss the need for expert consultation and analysis.
- Help identify contextual risks and “map” known intelligence.
- Gather and share intelligence from within and out of the area.
- Collate data to create a local understanding of need.
- Increase understanding of geographical “hotspots” and local themes
- Ensure partnership disruption of exploitation is purposeful and reduces the risk of exploitation and improved outcomes for children, young people and adults with care and support needs.
- Keep up to date with current practice research and themes and to share findings as they relate to us here in Walsall.

Investment from across the partnership is critical to fully tackle all facets of exploitation and here in Walsall we are having some real success in our responses to those at risk. As a partnership we work well to identify risk and intervene as appropriate but our systems rely heavily on the investment from partner agencies with clear assessment frameworks, referral pathways and sharing of resources in order to offer both support and intervention alongside the need to pursue prosecutions.

Partnership Updates

Police

This past year has been marked by our strides in our ongoing commitment to combat exploitation and organised crime, reflecting both our tactical adaptability and strategic foresight. The enhanced leadership structure, notably with the appointment of a Superintendent as co-chair of the All-Age Exploitation initiative in April 2024, has fortified our approach, aligning efforts across sectors for a unified response to these pervasive challenges.

The establishment of the Serious Organised Exploitation Team underlines our proactive stance against exploitation, employing a mix of innovative and traditional enforcement tactics to disrupt criminal networks. The success of targeted operations, particularly the County Lines intensification weeks and Operation Advance, underscores our effectiveness in safeguarding vulnerable populations and engaging the community in our prevention efforts.

Our public awareness campaigns, including the impactful #lookcloser initiative and a Crimestoppers collaboration, have been pivotal in educating the community on the signs of exploitation and the critical importance of reporting. These campaigns have

significantly bolstered our outreach, particularly in educational settings, fostering a protective environment for our youth.

The detailed enforcement actions undertaken during a specified County Lines Intensification Week (CLIW) for the Walsall LPA exemplify our commitment to operational excellence and accountability. With significant arrests made for a range of serious offences, the execution of search warrants yielding substantial seizures of drugs, cash, and weapons, and the recovery of a viable firearms, our resolve in dismantling criminal operations is clear.

Furthermore, our approach to tackling exploitation extends beyond traditional law enforcement, as evidenced by our recent operations against suspected brothel activities in collaboration with Black Country Women's Aid. This operation exemplifies our victim-centred approach, prioritising safeguarding over enforcement actions that might compromise the welfare of those we aim to protect.

As we move forward, our focus remains on refining our operational tactics and enhancing the quality of referrals through continuous education on exploitation. The ongoing participation in Trauma-Informed Practice and efforts to improve the standards of exploitation referrals are critical to our strategy.

The collective achievements of the past year not only demonstrate a high level of dedication and professionalism but also highlight the substantial impact of our work on enhancing community safety and well-being. Looking ahead, we are motivated by our accomplishments and remain dedicated to further innovating and strengthening our collective response to all-age exploitation and organised crime.

This update integrates the latest operational data and strategic developments into a coherent narrative, offering a comprehensive overview of our multifaceted approach to tackling these complex issues.

West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership

The West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnership continues to lead work across the region, encouraging and facilitating a system wide public health approach to preventing violence.

The VRP brings together a number of specialists to directly deliver and commission interventions and help different systems to work together more effectively to prevent violence. The work of the VRP focuses on a number of thematic areas including criminal justice; exploitation; health; education; sport; community engagement and trauma informed practice. The aim is to embed a whole systems approach that focuses on early identification and effective response to all forms of exploitation.

The VRP delivery team aims to:

- Deliver primary prevention, whole population approaches to violence prevention and reduction, including training, intervention, capacity building and awareness raising.

- Fund targeted work in areas we know are impacted more by violence (secondary prevention).
- Respond effectively as a partnership to incidents when they occur to limit the onward transmission of violence and address the trauma that serious incidents cause to individuals and communities (tertiary prevention).



WM VRP Exploitation Team Highlights:

- The VRP & Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) co-ordinate four regional boards leading on our regional responses to exploitation and missing; modern slavery and human trafficking; sexual assault & abuse; and domestic abuse. All four partnership boards are seeking to take a public health approach and are in the process of adopting public health frameworks.
- Supported the development and implementation of the Philomena Protocol.
- The regional [Exploitation and Missing Dashboard \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com) continues to develop, bringing together a variety of information to inform our understanding of the risk, threat and harm of exploitation across the region
- A competency, training and development framework has been produced to support organisations and professionals to understand the different levels of knowledge and experience required to effectively identify and respond to exploitation and abuse.
- A best practice guide has been launched to support professionals working with young people who are recognised by the National Referral Mechanism and are transitioning into adulthood.
- Delivery of training webinars to support continued professional development across the region which includes an Introduction to exploitation.
- Commissioning of a range of interventions to support young people at risk of exploitation and abuse, including Navigators in A&E and Custody, and primary prevention programmes in schools, including REAL County Lines and Exploitation products.
- Working towards a regional approach to risk analysis and identification of exploitation.
- VRP & OPCC hosted the first regional Anti-Slavery Conference – attended by statutory partners from across the region influencing approaches to tackling and developing modern slavery and human trafficking pathways. This was supported by a training schedule with up to 400 people attending different webinars.
- County lines awareness weeks October 2023 and March 2024: offered regional training schedule to professionals, parents, carers and grandparents. Sessions delivered to approximately 4000 individuals.

Overview of WM VRP in Walsall:

VRP funding has been used in Walsall to fund the Mossley Big Local Project to deliver bleed kit training to local residents; Vision for All to deliver outreach work in the Blakenhall area; and Walsall Children's Services to deliver the Draw & Talking Training which will be delivered to a range of professionals in youth justice, early help, pupil referral units and schools with high exclusion rates to better equip them to support children and young people at risk of knife crime and/or gangs.

VRP have delivered Virtual Reality Knives training to Police School Intervention and Prevention Officers (SIPOs) and PCSOs who have been delivering this training into schools as part of primary prevention in the borough. VRP continue to deliver these programmes to schools in Walsall including Ormiston Academy, Walsall Academy, Joseph Leckie Academy, Blue Coat whilst seeking to introduce it into new schools including Abu Baker school, Aldridge school and Shireoak. 71 young people received in-person intervention training (30 Round Midnight Gangs, 15 Round Midnight Knives & 26 REAL County Lines); and 29 professionals received in-person training (2 MVP, 1 REAL County Lines, 14 Round Midnight Gangs & 12 Round Midnight Knives) including PCSOs and SIPOs.

The Walsall stakeholder meeting continues to take place on a monthly basis bringing together individuals and organisations to focus on preventing and reducing violence, sharing and maximising resources where possible. There are 200 members of the network who receive regular information from VRP.

The Knife Angel came to Walsall in December 2023, where VRP delivered the virtual reality knives programme at the hub based in the bus station with the support of PCSO's.

Meetings with the OPCC and VRP have also taken place in regards to retail crime to reduce violence against staff at the Co-Op, Pets at Home and Dunelm and the VRP are in talks to arrange trauma training for public facing staff.

The Walsall local violence reduction partnership has produced a strategic needs assessment and a local delivery plan in response to the requirements of the Serious Violence Duty. WM VRP have produced a regional response strategy, by drawing together the common themes and priorities emerging from the strategic needs assessments developed for each of the seven areas within the region.

The West Midlands Violence Reduction Strategy was co-produced with communities, young people and partners and signed off by the VRP Strategic Board in January 2024. The 5 strategic objectives in the strategy include:

1.Prevention across the life-course

2.Development of a sustainable, community and youth led approach to violence reduction

3. Building closer regional partnerships that support innovation
4. Development of a West Midlands wide movement that aims for a violence free region
5. Upscale delivery of evidence-based programs in schools

The VRP Delivery Plan for 2024/2025 is focused on these priorities. To support accessibility of the strategy the VRP Youth Assembly have produced a young person's strategy, and developed a counter-narrative which will form the foundations of a regional **campaign** which will be launched in May 2025. The campaign aims to embed a positive counter-narrative to youth violence across the region which can build a movement of young people who want to stand against violence, and will be promoted across Walsall.

Step Together continues to be delivered in Alumwell via EYES and the funding for this route has been extended until the end of the financial year (March 2023). The Joseph Leckie route also continues to be delivered by Birmingham City Football Club and will be transferred to Birmingham City Innovate during quarter 4.

Health – ICB

The Designated Nurses across the ICB Black Country Footprint take responsibility for a portfolio of work which is overseen by the ICB Safeguarding Steering Group. These portfolios include cross cutting safeguarding issues where standardisation of approach and monitoring is desirable and necessary and so that duplication of effort can be avoided. As part of this, Exploitation is a key workstream across the Black Country (B/C) footprint and has been a key priority since 2022 and remains. A key focus has been to review the health support for Exploitation Hubs within each local place, strengthening partnerships and response to children at risk which are discussed at exploitations hubs/health forums by identifying gaps and seeking a solution. A systemwide Exploitation Options Proposal was developed for operational specialist nurse support to work across the B/C footprint supporting the Exploitation Agenda. The proposal and funding were approved by the ICB and BCHFT have recruited to the post, and the Nurse is due to commence in April 2024. The role will enhance sharing of health information into the hub discussions and ensure lead health professionals are updated.

In the interim, to support Exploitation at Walsall Place the ICB produced a flow chart and have had agreement from the 0-19 Team and CIC Team in Walsall that they would receive notifications of Children who had been discussed at Exploitation Triage, this aids information sharing and supports decision making and managing risk. In addition WHT and BCHFT also attend the Delivery Groups and Exploitation Panels at place and the ICB continue to have oversight via the Strategic Exploitation Group.

In addition, an ICB System wide Exploitation event was held in February 2024 with NHSE Safeguarding Lead Kenny Gibson opening the event. The event included an overview of Exploitation in the Black Country from the VRP and Research in Practice

updating on the latest learning to improve multiagency working in Exploitation. The event was attended by over 70 health professionals and anecdotal feedback has been extremely positive.

The Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Adults is an active member of the Partnership Strategic Exploitation meeting and continues to chair the highly regarded All Age Exploitation Health group.

The Health Exploitation Group in Walsall continues to provide a structure in facilitating and embedding learning within the member health organisations to support systems in preventing abuse of children and adults at risk of exploitation. The group employ joint working to consider the impacts on all critical areas of business in protecting and recognising children and adults from exploitation and organised criminality. These arrangements seek to ensure each health partner/organisation will safeguard their stakeholders and promote the welfare of children and young people, vulnerable adults and protect the public in Walsall. The group is regularly attended and supported by the Principal Exploitation Reduction Officer from Walsall LA. This reinforces partnership working and has improved communication pathways. The group organised a face-to-face event in May 2023 and the session was attended by the health Exploitation Champions, with a focus on improving referral rates to the hub and raising awareness of exploitation across the health economy. There is a further event planned for later this year.

As a commissioning organisation the ICB continues to monitor our health providers Safeguarding Training (including Exploitation) compliance via system wide Safeguarding Dashboards and also assurance visits and including Exploitation as part of Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE). This gives assurance that all staff have the appropriate level of training to respond to Safeguarding Risks. The Safeguarding Team ensure all communication and training opportunities relating to Exploitation is disseminated accordingly across the health economy in Walsall. In addition, GPs receive bespoke training around Exploitation.

Health – Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust

The Lead Nurse for exploitation is now embedded in all 4 geographical areas in the Black Country. The post is shared between a 4 day practitioner and a 2 day practitioner, ensuring there is a suitable time for both practitioners to meet and discuss the exploitation agenda. A third exploitation nurse will be commencing imminently to provide input into all 4 exploitation hubs. In Walsall, this will include attendance at some of the daily meetings where all age exploitation cases are discussed. The nurses attend numerous exploitation meeting across the area including Channel, Contest, Prevent, CSA strategy. BCHFT are hosting a nurse for 12 months who will contribute to information sharing and risk assessing those at risk of exploitation. This nurse will provide relevant Health information from Mental Health services, GP, acute setting/ Urgent care centres, School Nurse and sexual Health services. This will be an important achievement in exploitation and highlight the importance of health information in these forums.

The 2 day practitioner focuses on the PREVENT aspect of exploitation whilst providing links to useful resources and events. Currently all exploitation assessments are progressed via the Exploitation Triage. The Health practitioner will be keen to share good practice from other exploitation hubs in the local area and formulate the optimum strategy for Walsall. The Nurses currently have oversight of all 4 geographical hubs and has shared good practice with each individual hub, some of which has been adopted in their own hub triage. In order to improve the outcomes of those at risk of exploitation, the leads will progress any suggestions with partner agencies once the 3rd nurse joins the team.

Youth Justice Service

Via our exploitation triage-based discussion, for those children that are identified as being exposed to exploitative based influences, a timely and specific multi-agency intervention-based approach is consistently being adopted. Furthermore, a collective and timely effort is made to ensure a more specific exploitation screening process is undertaken and, where appropriate, prompt referrals are made into the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). What is delivered intervention-wise is holistic and draws on what is available, as a collective, from across Children's Services. The goal is that this further develops, reinforces and/or enhances what is being delivered in response to the needs of the child and their family/carer in the event that they are already open to Walsall Children's Social Care or Early Help service. For those children who are not known, and meet the eligibility criteria specified, there is a consent-based preventative referral route open via the Turnaround Project.

Our intervention as a Youth Justice Service focuses on behavioural, welfare and criminogenic/exploitative based need and our plans are unique and individualised to the child concerned. Considerable effort is made in capturing the voice of the child as part of our initial (and ongoing) assessment process. What is provided support wise is tailored to individual risk and need and may incorporate elements of education/employment based support, lived experience exploitation based mentoring (St.Giles), Disproportionality based mentoring and engagement in positive based activity with the music studio, digital media, football and mixed martial arts being four of the current options we have open to us. These options are open to every child that we work with, not just those that have been referred through the exploitation based triage process. We are currently in the process of developing further our intervention and support based portfolio with an exciting link being fostered with our colleagues at Walsall Art Gallery around the provision of an art based therapy option.

Community Safety and Enforcement

Community Safety and Enforcement are responsible for a several functions which protect the public and in particular children from harm; the service consist of the following teams Community Safety, Community Protection, Environmental Health, Licensing and Trading Standards.

The Head of Community Safety and Enforcement co-chairs the All Age exploitation Sub Group with the local policing Superintendent and this has lead to much closer alignment of Childrens Services strategic and operational child exploitation work during 2023/4.

There are certain key elements of the services work which contribute to the exploitation agenda and key pieces of work undertaken during 2023/4 are listed below:

Licensing - The council renewed its Gambling Statement of Principles during the year ensuring it is fit for purpose and sets out how the council will meet the licensing objectives which are

- to prevent gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder or being used to support crime
- to make sure gambling is conducted in a fair and open way
- to protect children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling

In accordance with the powers under s157(h) of the Gambling Act and having regard to the Gambling Commission's Guidance to Licensing Authorities, the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership was designated as the competent body to advise Walsall Council about the protection of children from harm.

The service also conducted public consultation with regard to a new Convictions Policy and Fit and Proper Person Policy in terms of its responsibilities when issuing licences to the Taxi and Private Hire Trade. The new Policies were adopted in February 2024 and reflected more accurately statutory guidance set out by the Department for Transport relating to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. A recent complaint investigated by the Police, Street Teams and Walsall Council Community Protection resulted in the revocation of a private hire vehicle drivers licence on the grounds of alleged inappropriate sexual messages being sent to a vulnerable young person by a licensed driver. This shows positive partnership working and robust implementation of the council's powers against those who may seek to do harm.

Trading Standards are responsible for the enforcement of law relating to age restricted products such as tobacco, alcohol, vapes and knives. The service receives complaints and intelligence with regard to businesses breaching these rules from the public and partner agencies, they conduct educational visits to the premises and then organise for children acting on behalf of the authority to attempt to purchase age restricted products under the close supervision of trained officers. The sale of such products to children can cause physical harm, lead to drunken behaviour that can cause ASB or lead to the exploitation of children by unscrupulous persons including organised criminal gangs. During 203/4 Trading standards seized 320,000 illicit cigarettes, 126kg of illicit hand rolling tobacco and 10,500 illegal vapes from 71 premises across the Borough. Staff also liaised with Police colleagues on visits to premises to ensure knife sales were being properly supervised at stores in Walsall with reasonable levels of compliance.

Environmental Health working alongside Trading Standards carried out visits to sun bed premises across Walsall to ensure that they were trading safely but also preventing young persons from accessing the services. Some complaints indicated that children as young as 12 were accessing sun bed premises and whilst the risk to their health is of importance some premises can be run by or of interest to persons willing to exploit children.

Community Safety have following a restructure started to pull together partners under the Safer Walsall Partnership banner to tackle serious issue in local areas. The locality tasking model which now exists in both the north and south of the Borough and brings partners together to develop positive activity to tackle a variety of issues affecting communities. This has been particularly helpful as a partnership vehicle to introduce diversionary activity in the Bloxwich area following a spate of serious asb and youth violence.

Community Protection are the team that takes enforcement action against a variety of anti-social behaviours in Walsall they work closely with partners such as the police, fire service and social landlords to ensure the public are protected from harm they are therefore key partners on the locality tasking work and alongside community safety have carried out a number of interventions during the year which help to protect vulnerable persons from harm and exploitation.

- Development of off-road vehicle operations with police fixed wing aircraft and drones leading to the seizure of over 40 uninsured and nuisance vehicles.
- Proactive work with night-time economy venues including pubwatch, bleed kits, knife detection equipment, drugs, and stop and search policies. Liaison with partner agencies and traders with regard to requests to hold under 16 discos in the town centre at licensed venues.
- Continued support for the Black Country Car Cruising injunction leading to a number of interim injunctions being awarded by the High Court while the Supreme Court consider an appeal based on injunctions on unknown persons.
- Enforcement action taken on 127 occasions in relation to void buildings where concerns had been raised of people including children gaining access to 'hang out' cause vandalism, drink, smoke and take part in sexual activity. In general, the commercial premises such as void pubs were of most concern and in one case led to the complete enclosure of a derelict pub with six-foot fencing to prevent regular trespass by local youths.

Street Teams

The priorities we are addressing:

- **Prevention of exploitation of children/young people and young adults:** there has been an increase in child exploitation across the country with our own referrals rising by 12% over the past 12 months. Referrals to our boy's project have increased by 87% over the past 5 years due to the rise in criminal exploitation (CCE) in Walsall. This has become a real problem locally, particularly County Lines drug rings due to our central location in the country and easy access to motorway systems. There has also been a dramatic rise in youth violence/knife crime, which in our experience is often associated with drug use. The use of serious category drugs such as Cocaine and MDMA has also become 'normalised' and we are now seeing an increase in mental health issues in our service users.
- **Reducing the likelihood of children/young people with increased vulnerabilities from being targeted by perpetrators:** Annually, around ¾ of our service users live in areas that fall within the 10% most deprived places to live in England. Their families struggle with poverty/low income, are lone parents, have a

partner in prison, are unemployed, in debt, live in rented/social housing or have experienced domestic abuse. These factors can increase a child's vulnerability to being targeted by abusers and are known as 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (ACE's).

- **Supporting local communities** to build their own prevention strategies to reduce the risks of exploitation of children, young people and adults living with them.
- **Improving recognition of exploitation** by raising awareness amongst professionals and frontline workers to increase early intervention.
- **Ensuring that vulnerable young people transition safely into adulthood**, whilst limiting pressure on their mental/physical health which could increase their risk of exploitation
- **Ensuring that local and regional policies and practices effectively recognise and support victims of all forms of exploitation including early intervention:**

Our Purpose

- To prevent all forms of child exploitation and to support victims and those at risk of exploitation to rebuild their lives.
- Help relieve the distress of children/young people who are victims of exploitation by helping them to improve their mental/physical health and develop their self-esteem
- Enable vulnerable young adults transitioning from children to adult services/no services, to stabilise their lives at a critical point of change, increasing resilience and awareness to vulnerability factors like exploitation.
- Educate children/young people how to recognise grooming techniques/exploitation to help them to improve their understanding and awareness of potential risks
- Support families whose child/children have been exploited/are at risk of exploitation, to help them recognise grooming/exploitation and how to improve protective factors within their family unit to help reduce the risks of abuse
- Train professionals, parents, and the wider community to understand the impact of exploitation and to recognise potential victims at the earliest opportunity
- Educate professionals, parents, and the wider community to understand the impact of exploitation and to increase awareness and improve early identification of abuse
- Re-enforce community resilience to exploitation and enable them to develop a sustainable response to child exploitation at a local level
- To be the Voice of the Victim.

Over the past 12 months Street Teams has provided:

- 1:1 face-to-face support for 147 vulnerable and abused children/young people to help them to understand how they have been exploited and gain the confidence and skills to remove themselves from harm
- Support for 40 families whose child/children have been groomed/exploited/or are at risk of exploitation, plus 41 siblings, to help to reduce the potential for further abuse
- Help for 26 vulnerable young people transitioning from children's services to adult services/no services to reduce any risks of destabilisation, which could heighten their risk of abuse

- Education and prevention workshops to 8,555 schoolchildren to help them to understand grooming and exploitation techniques and the risks of carrying weapons
- Outreach work in targeted communities that face additional challenges (e.g. deprivation/unemployment/community tensions), resulting in 13 children/young people being referred for early intervention
- Training for 622 professionals, parents, and volunteers to help them to recognise abuse and appropriately intervene, as part of our early intervention approach.
- Contributed to all partnership activities, including County Lines Intensification weeks.
- Triage attendance daily and chairing role once a week.
- Sharing of all intelligence/information with police.
- Attended all relevant meetings across the partnership.

Next steps

Over the next 12 months we will continue to evaluate and develop our work collectively across the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership. We will conclude and report on the impact of the CARE project and the further learning from the Exploitation Pilot team, to review and consider what a wider adolescent safeguarding offer, inclusive of exploitation, may look like moving forward. We will continue to be involved in joint regional initiatives such as County Lines Intensification weeks and Walsall will continue to play an integral role in the development of our regional work with the support of the Violence Reduction Partnership.

We will continue to provide good quality training and development opportunities across the partnership in relation to Child Exploitation and will use forums such as the Exploitation delivery group and Exploitation Panel to ensure that good practice and areas of further development are identified and responded to. The partnership response in regard to exploitation in Walsall is strong, but there is always more to be done. Collectively, and with the continuation of good multi agency working, I am confident that the good work identified within this report can continue to move forward for the benefit of our children in Walsall.

We will continue to understand and be responsive to emerging exploitation themes and trends whilst using data insights, evidence and learning, to strengthen predictive and responsive capabilities whilst also focusing on prevention as a form of protection. We will utilise the findings of the strategic needs assessment to support development of a revised exploitation strategy and delivery plan to continue to drive practice improvements across the partnership and achieve strategic aims, to ensure positive outcomes for our children and young people in Walsall.

Report prepared by

Rebecca Warren

Head of Service, Help, Protection and Support, Walsall Children's Social Care

**Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
16th April 2024**

Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment.

Cllr Stacie Elson - Children's Portfolio Holder

Executive Summary

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership recognises that Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is prevalent in the UK and that for many victims, the impact of this abuse can be devastating and endure into adulthood. In June 2023 CSA became the fourth strategic priority in Walsall following a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy Review, Scope and Proposal being presented at Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Executive Group in April 2023. A CSA subgroup was formed in September 2023 with the specific aim of ensuring that there is a shared understanding of the impact of CSA and how, as a partnership, we work with children, young people and families at the earliest opportunity to prevent long lasting impact.

There are nearly 13 million children in England and Wales, each of whom needs and deserves to be protected from harm. Babies, toddlers and children are potentially at risk, with current estimates indicating that 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys experience child sexual abuse before the age of 16. In March 2020, the Office for National Statistics estimated that 3.1 million adults in England and Wales had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16. Both nationally and locally there is concern around the number of safeguarding cases featuring child sexual abuse within the family environment. The role of the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup is to address the challenges in identification, assessment and response to child sexual abuse within the family environment. A strategic needs assessment focussed on child sexual abuse will be completed by Summer 2024 supporting a revised Child Sexual Abuse Strategy.

2. Reason for Scrutiny

This is the first annual report outlining previous and current partnership activity relating to tackling Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment in Walsall. The report serves to update the committee of the work undertaken to date of the CSA Subgroup and the recently formed CSA delivery group. This report aims to provide assurances and updates into the partnership response to Child Sexual abuse.

3. Recommendations

To note and endorse the current plans over seen by the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup and child sexual abuse delivery group.

Resource and legal considerations

Responding to children at risk of significant harm is a statutory duty placed on Local Authority Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, Strategic Partnership Chairs and senior managers within organisations who commission and provide services for children and families. The resources required to respond to this statutory requirement

come from within the existing resources across the partnership of organisations working in Walsall to protect vulnerable children and those at risk of harm.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities

One of our corporate priorities is that children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well. We also aim to provide people to have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities. In Walsall, we strive to ensure that communities are prospering and resilient and that our children are living in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

Citizen impact

The effective delivery of high quality services to protect children and young people from significant harm, including the risk of child sexual abuse which has a direct impact on the welfare and well-being of children and young people in Walsall. It directly links to the corporate priority to Improve Health and Wellbeing and the Children's Services objective that all children in Walsall, whatever their needs, are safe and supported.

Environmental impact

Not applicable for this report

Performance management

Protection from abuse is a fundamental right for all children. Our vision continues to ensure that children, young people and their families whose lives are affected by child sexual abuse will receive a high level of support, protection, and that offenders are held accountable for their actions, and brought to justice.

There are both quantitative and qualitative measures being considered to ensure that there is both assurance and insight into the current work being underway and to inform continued service development. The Child Sexual Abuse Delivery Group, which reports into the Subgroup and takes forward the partnership work plan has begun to map data and performance information. This work will inform the proposed Child Sexual Abuse Strategic Needs Assessment, which will offer a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and areas for development in the Walsall Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

Reducing inequalities

The Equality Act 2010 puts a responsibility on public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. This applies to the process of identification of need and risk faced by the individual child and the process of assessment. No child or group of children must be treated any less favourably than others in being able to access effective services which meet their particular needs. To comply with the Equality Act 2010, safeguarding partners must assess and where appropriate put in place measures ahead of time to support all children and families to access services, overcoming any barriers they may face due to a particular protected characteristic (WT-23).

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership developed a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy (2020-2023) This sets out the vision that Walsall Council has to ensure the co-ordinated provision of services designed to address the protection of children at risk of sexual harm. Dr Helen Lowey will be completing a revised Strategic Needs that will inform an updated strategy

in light of Walsall Safeguarding Partnership determining that child sexual abuse is to be seen as a strategic priority. Dr Helen Lowey has already completed strategic needs analysis in other related areas such as sexual exploitation and domestic abuse. The revised strategy will outline specific support for those children and young people who are at risk of significant harm, including those with protected characteristics of gender, disability, race and religion.

In line with our corporate priorities, Walsall sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services in order to have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children and young people. Local Authorities, Police and Health Services as key local partners must provide a robust safeguarding approach to ensure they have arrangements in place to provide adequate protection for children at risk of child sexual abuse. This work will be overseen and scrutinised by the key functions of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership business unit.

Introduction

Sexual abuse is defined in Working Together 2023 as:

Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts, such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, 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. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.

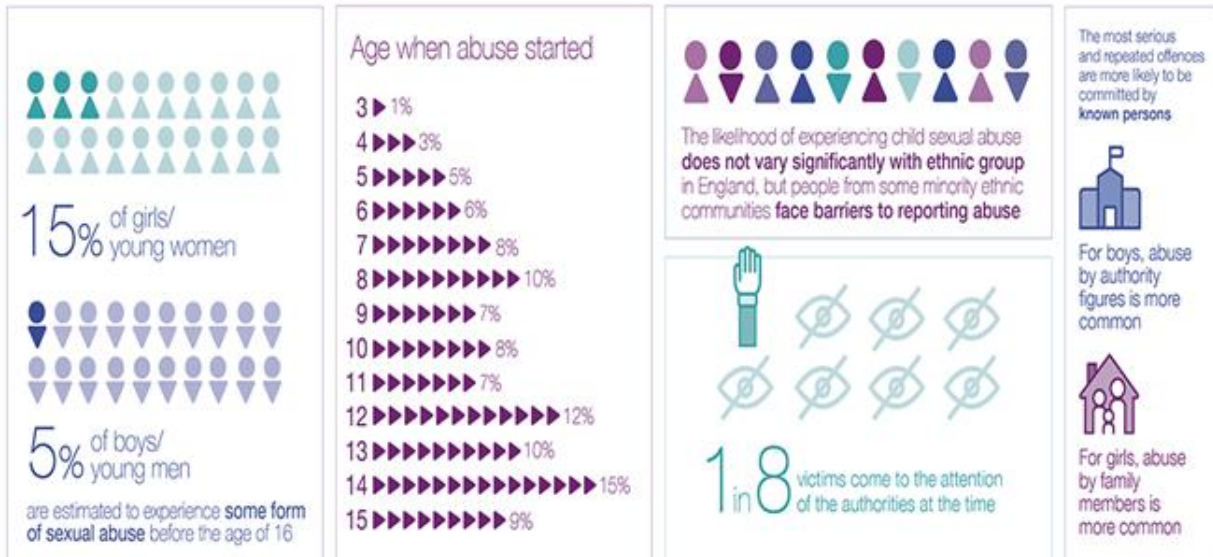
Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (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 using technology.

Both forms of abuse are strategic priorities in Walsall, the decision to have two distinct strategies one for CSA and one for child exploitation is in recognition that whilst both are forms of sexual abuse, they each require focussed attention in order to be able to provide an effective partnership response given the intra and extra familial distinctions. The work of the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup is focussed on child sexual abuse within the family environment. Abuse may involve relatives, or others who feel like family from the child's point of view. The family environment is a common context in which child sexual abuse occurs accounting for almost half of all child sexual abuse offences reported to the police in England and Wales. Most people who sexual abuse children in a family context are male, although abuse by females does occur. There has been debate within the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup and Delivery Group that seeks to widen the scope of the existing strategy to widen the scope of activity and understanding of child sexual abuse in considering online abuse.

National Data provided by the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse tells us the following:

A snapshot of child sexual abuse

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse



Disabled adults are **2x** as likely as non-disabled adults to say they had been abused in their childhood

1 in 4 of those who had lived in a care home reported experiences of child sexual abuse - almost 4x as many as those living with family / carers

92% of child sexual abuse images depicted girls only in 2019

92% of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are male

References: Department for Education: Characteristics of children in need: 2019 to 2020. Home Office Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes, year ending March 2020, updated 28 October 2020. Calculated using single-year prevalence estimates by age group (Radford et al, 2011, Childhood abuse and neglect in the UK today) and the Office for National Statistics 2019 population estimates. To read the full report - The scale and nature of child sexual abuse: Review of evidence 2021 - visit www.csecentre.org.uk

Difficulty in identification of child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse often takes place alongside other forms of physical, emotional abuse or neglect. Both nationally, regionally and locally the rates of children subject to child protection plans are low though with refreshed attention and focus there has been some increases. Where sexual abuse occurs, it is not commonly witnessed by an independent third party. Victims of sexual abuse are often vulnerable children, allegations of sexual abuse often emerge a considerable time after the sexual abuse has taken place and may emerge in a piecemeal fashion. Data analysed by the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse outlines how far more children are sexually abused than services identify:

Far more children are sexually abused than services identify

Child sexual abuse in 2021/22: Trends in official data
csacentre.org.uk



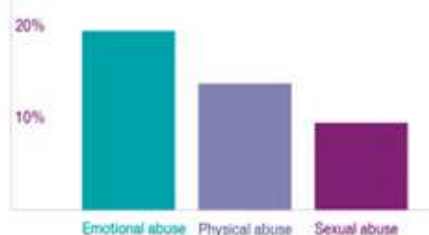
Sexual abuse is just as common as other forms of childhood abuse

But concerns of sexual abuse are far less likely to be identified and named

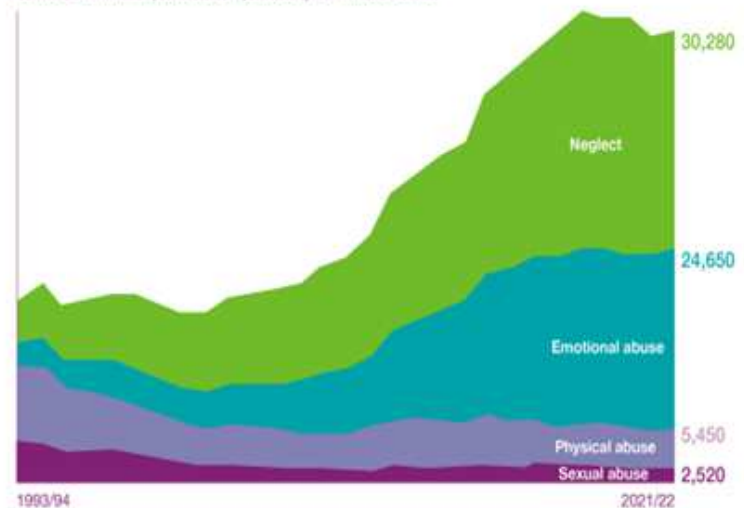
Similar levels of child abuse are identified in surveys



...but lower levels of child sexual abuse are identified in child protection assessments



Number of child protection plans by form of abuse



Sources: Office for National Statistics, Child abuse in England and Wales, 2020; Department for Education, Characteristics of Children in need, 2021/22

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

The National Context

Nationally, reports have identified the need for organisations to adopt a strategic approach that prioritises the identification and response to child sexual abuse particularly that occurring in and around the family environment. Recognising evidence relating to historic difficulties, the government has identified the importance of equipping professional working directly with children with the understanding and skills they need to identify child sexual abuse. With the voices and experience of victims and survivors at the centre so that they are safeguarded and supported, improving the understanding of the scale and nature of sexual abuse has been identified. In addition, ensuring more effective disruption and prevention by better understanding the abusive behaviour/perpetration.

Local Context

In 2020, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency partners commenced work on the Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership Strategy Multi-Agency Response to Child Sexual Abuse 2020-2023. The Strategy was signed off in July 2021 at the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Subgroup (As it was in 2020, the equivalent of the Senior Leadership Group-SLG, as it is now). It was acknowledged that all Walsall Safeguarding Partnership members must take a leadership approach in bringing the strategy and resulting implementation to their agency. The effectiveness of each agency's approach to CSA would be monitored through Section 11 audits, multi-agency file audits and the performance and quality assurance subgroup activity. There was an ask that all Partnership members must commit to ensuring their staff access appropriate training and take responsibility for raising awareness amongst themselves and with their service users. This work was to provide the foundation for CSA becoming a fourth partnership priority, once sufficient traction had been gained. Work relating to child sexual abuse in

Walsall required greater prominence, momentum with strengthened governance and the necessary resources to drive the agenda forward.

In May 2023, the conviction of twenty-one people for serious sexual offending against children in Walsall was one of the biggest investigations in the West Midlands. The children from one of these families was part of the W6 Safeguarding Child Review (SCR) 2018 which was part of the larger Operational Satchel investigation. Recommendations from the W6 SCR report informed the development of an action plan. Amongst these was the need for WSP to develop a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy. This was completed in 2020 and is published on the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership web site.

In June 2023 CSA became the fourth strategic priority in Walsall following a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy Review, Scope and Proposal being presented at Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Executive Group in April 2023. The focus of this priority is CSA in the family environment. Operation Satchel identified the prevalence of sexual abuse over many years within several families. Given the scale and profile of the abuse, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership need to be able to continue to evidence that any subsequent learning that has emerged has been used to inform work in this area. It was recognised that the CSA Strategy needed to be updated along with devising a clear assessment, and plan.

Due to Operation Satchel, findings from other learning reviews and the increased awareness surrounding sexual abuse, in Walsall close monitoring of increased need and demand for services will be required. The borough is also likely to be a place of interest and learning locally, regionally, and nationally. Recognising the complexities and challenges, the government has identified child sexual abuse as a priority and is making significant investment in this area.

Collectively these reports demonstrate a shift towards adopting a whole system/public health type focus which recognises the impact of sexual abuse primarily for victims and survivors and communities (Centre of Expertise (2019) and Tackling Child Sexual Abuse (2021) The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (ICSA 2022). Both the importance of a national framework with the flexibility for local leaders to respond to local issues is identified. Finally, the importance of intelligence led and data informed approaches including research about victims, survivors, locations, and perpetrators (see data section). Crucially, the current development to the WSP Performance and Quality Assurance Framework also reflects this approach.

The child safeguarding practice panel conducted a national review into child sexual abuse within the family home and are due to report findings in Summer 2024. The sub group are alive to these developments as the same key lines of enquiry that led to the national review resonate in the key challenges locally. The two strands of the enquiry involve:

- safeguarding partners and multi-agency bodies working together to identify offenders in or entering a child's family home with an express aim of better improving multi agency collaboration.
- Robust responses to allegations or suspicions of child sexual abuse within the family environment to protect children from ongoing or recurrent harm.

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership have identified the need to review work in this area and the need to work in collaboration with organisations such as the Centre of Expertise in Sexual Abuse to adopt a systemic approach. Building upon the strengths identified as

part of the ILAC and JTAI inspections this will strengthen the response. Ensuring that the voice and experience of our 4th partners is heard and that practitioners are supported with clear outcome measures that measure impact is critical. Collectively, this will enable creative, innovative and evidence informed ways of tackling sexual abuse to support identification, response, support, and prevention.

Progress of CSA Subgroup

The CSA subgroup was formed in recognition of child sexual abuse as a strategic priority, the first subgroup met in September 23 and meeting bi-monthly from this point. There is partnership commitment reflected by the commitment of time and expertise to the subgroup with senior leaders of all key statutory and voluntary organisations forming the membership of the subgroup. To deal with a problem as pervasive and destructive as child sexual abuse, everyone must work together. Expertise lies in many different places: in lived experiences, practice knowledge and academic research. The CSA subgroup is making an active effort to draw on both partnership expertise alongside the expertise of other organisations in order to support the ambitious delivery plan. There is a need to improve our understanding of the incidence and prevalence of CSA; to support greater professional confidence; to build a greater capacity for prevention and response; and to better support children and their families.

In addition, the CSA Delivery Group has also been established, and first met in December 23. The Delivery group meets on a monthly basis to progress the Delivery Plan, taking on board the complexities of CSA and the need to adopt a phased approach.

The four P approach

As with All Age Exploitation, the 4 P approach (Plan, Prepare, Prevent and prosecute) is being used alongside the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership PQA Framework to underpin this work. There has been an evidenced partnership approach to the work of this group, the plan that has been developed and the pace that it is being progressed. The phased plan includes two strands: a short-term plan which the Delivery Group is currently working on and a further long-term plan will be reviewed from April 24 whilst the Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) is being undertaken. The CSA subgroup has used the findings from the Proposal Report and MAA Children's Audit to inform the interim plan. Commencement of the SNA is due to commence in Spring 24 and Professor Helen Lowry has been commissioned to undertake this work. Due to the ongoing work around CSA and Exploitation it has been agreed at the Executive Group that that the Conference initially planned for March 24 will be delayed until September 24 to allow for the SNA to be completed and work to then commence on updating the Strategy.

A risk register is being formulated in congruence with Walsall Safeguarding Partnership subgroup expectations. This will enable close scrutiny on timeliness of the delivery of the SNA, strategy and delivery plan.

Working Together 2023 sets out partnership arrangements and responsibilities. The ambitions of the CSA subgroup have been devised to be congruent with the guidance and practice standards defined within this key document:

- an unrelenting focus on protection and the best outcomes for children.
- creating learning cultures in which practitioners stay up to date as new evidence of best practice emerges.

- creating an environment in which it is safe to challenge, including assumptions that relate to ethnicity, sex, disability, and sexuality.
- supporting practitioners with effective supervision as determined by their regulatory body in which they can critically reflect on their findings and strengthen their analysis.
- helping practitioners to understand the impact of their decisions on the child and family.

Health

The Designated Nurses across the system take responsibility for a portfolio of work which is overseen by the ICB Safeguarding Steering Group. These portfolios include cross cutting safeguarding issues where standardisation of approach and monitoring is desirable and necessary and so that duplication of effort can be avoided. As part of this, Child Sexual Abuse is a key workstream across the Black Country (B/C) footprint. Both the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children in Walsall and the Designated Dr for Safeguarding (Walsall) are active members of this group. In addition, they are both co-chairs of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership CSA Subgroup. The Partnership CSA Strategic Subgroup and also the Delivery Group both include health professionals from SARC for both Children and Adults, Walsall Health Care Trust and Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust.

A systemwide anogenital symptoms management pathway has been developed by the Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children. It is a pathway for the management of children who present with anogenital symptoms with no disclosure of sexual assault/abuse and how this should be managed by health professionals to try and allay the anxiety around anogenital examination.

There was a well attended lunch where there was a focus on practical advice for practitioners to increase confidence and effectiveness in supporting children and families. The Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children provided a session explaining and demystifying the medical examination in suspected child sexual abuse to allow professionals to better support children and families. Evaluations were positive, a formal evaluation has been requested from the Centre of Expertise.

The Black Country Child Sexual Abuse Conference for Health Professionals was held on the 14th November 23 in conjunction with the Centre for Expertise in CSA. The agenda covered the scale and nature of CSA, the barriers to identification and the impact of CSA. There was a focus on practical advice for practitioners to increase confidence and effectiveness in supporting children and families. Evaluations were positive, a formal evaluation have also been requested from the Centre of Expertise.

Training and Development

A suite of training has been developed within the partnership focussed on both the wider partnerships identification and response to child sexual abuse, alongside more specialist training for practitioners who will investigate and undertake safeguarding actions in response to allegations or suspicions of child sexual abuse within the family environment. The aim has been to offer a broad preventative training offer to improve professional confidence and understanding around child sexual abuse for all professionals across the partnership, and then to provide more in depth and focused training for social workers and other professional leads. In addition to this, an in depth 'practice leads' offer has also been developed so that safeguarding leads, social workers and managers could under a

year long programme of development work. This would then be applied by those practitioners in their work with children and families, and they will also act as skilled and knowledgeable peers who can provide consultation, guidance and direct support for their colleagues when working with children and families where child sexual abuse is of concern.

Feedback from these sessions was positive and the skill and experience brought by the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse was recognised as highly beneficial. Feedback has been though that there remains a need for further development in using specific tools and methods when assessing needs, vulnerabilities, and risks around child sexual abuse. This will inform a second wave of training, which is being prepared so all practitioners can have training in child sexual abuse suitable to their needs. This specific piece of work has involved utilising the expertise of partners such as the police and probation as well as reaching out to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation who are experts within the field in order to elicit expertise and develop training and tools designed to support practitioners' confidence within these areas. A literature review is also underway led by our Principal Social Worker to ensure there is alignment of proposed training and tools that compliment our existing offer.

Progress of the Delivery Group

The Delivery Group has met three times since it was formed in December 2023, and will be meeting monthly going forwards. The initial focus of the group has been to review and develop the CSA Work Plan, to identify and address actions which can be undertaken immediately to gain traction and get some key areas of the work plan done, and to establish a methodology and approach to continuing practice improvement.

The Work Plan has been updated, and The Delivery Group has set out a methodology based on understanding what data and performance information is available, exploring what this may tell us, and aligning this with planned quality assurance work. This combination of quantitative data analysis and qualitative audits and practice evaluations will be used to continuously understand practice across the partnership and identify areas for practice learning that will then be added to the Work Plan. The Delivery Group has reviewed data collation across the partnership that support understanding of child sexual abuse within the borough. Both Children's Social Care and the Police have provided overview data that can form the baseline of enquiry, and other partners have also contributed their data. This data is in the process of being cross referenced to give an initial partnership data set.

Alongside this, previous audits have identified key strands of work. The Delivery Group and Task and Finish Groups has and will be picking up these key areas as follows:

1. A group has been established and reviewed resources and information available on the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership for all professionals.
2. The group has collated an updated list of all services and key contacts for all professionals.
3. Good practice learning is being collated into a staff briefing.
4. The group will review practice learning for disabled children and children with learning needs.
5. An updated Child Sexual Abuse multi-agency pathway is being developed to provide guidance for all professionals.

6. Updated needs and risk assessment tools and resources are being developed. The first stage is to evaluate the literature on best practice and to explore existing tools.
7. A simple signs and indicators – ‘Things to Look Out For’ for all professionals and that can be adapted for families will be developed.
8. Review the current training programme, take up across the partnership, and its effectiveness, and develop future iterations of CSA training offer.
9. Link with partnership work on inter-agency communication systems.

These key areas will be delivered in 2024 to continue with gaining traction on the progress of the Work Plan, whilst also getting systems in place for continued learning and improvement as above.

Decide

Whilst the CSA subgroup is in its infancy the impetus for change and commitment of the partnership is demonstrating strengths in wanting to make the changes needed in order to safeguard our children from harm. Significant activity has been undertaken in order that we deliver strategic partnership priorities of:

1. Ensuring that there is strategic commitment across all agencies to understand, prevent and reduce the impact of CSA.
2. Improve the capability of the multi-agency workforce to recognise and act on the signs of CSA.
3. Improve the effectiveness of assessment, planning and interventions to reduce CSA and respond in a consistent and timely way.
4. Evaluate our practice and systems through the use of our quality assurance mechanisms.

The committee is invited to determine whether the work completed to date will deliver the desired outcomes and to note the direction of travel.

Background papers

None

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Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Recommendation Tracker 2023/24

Committee Meeting Date	Agenda Item	Action/Recommendation	Officer responsible	Status	Target Completion Date	Notes
26 September 2023	Youth Justice	An agenda item on violence (youth justice) be scheduled for a future committee, with an invitation extended to partners	Phil Rutherford	In progress	April 2024	Complete
26 th September 2023	Areas of Focus	The following items be added to the Committee work programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children with disabilities. • An update on children’s services 	Clerk	In progress	April 2024	Complete
11 March 2024	Youth Justice – Reduction of Violence	Members remained concerned that attendance and exclusions appear to be a contributing factor to children entering the youth justice system and invited the Youth Justice Partners to attend a future meeting to discuss this issue.	Rachael Phillips	In progress	April 2025	To be scheduled in the new municipal year.
		That further information is provided on unmet health needs and contributing factors towards the rise in children entering the youth justice system.				

Children's Services OSC Areas of Focus 2023/24

Committee date	26 September	2 November	7 December	29 January	11 March	16 April
Report Deadline	15 September	24 October	28 November	18 January	29 February	5 April
Budget setting process		X				
Q2 financial monitoring		X				
Family/Locality Hubs			X			
Early Help Strategy			X			
Social Worker recruitment and retention				X		
Private Fostering				X		
Youth Justice priorities and disproportionately	X					
Youth Justice Partnership – reduction of Youth violence (partnership invite)					X	
Children at Risk Exploitation						X
Safeguarding Annual Report 2022/23			X			
Intra familial abuse strategy						X
Young Carers				X		
Children with disabilities					x	



FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

**Council House,
Lichfield Street,
Walsall, WS1 1TW**
www.walsall.gov.uk

4 MARCH 2024

FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan sets out decisions that are termed as “key decisions” at least 28 calendar days before they are due to be taken by the Executive (Cabinet). Also included on the plan are other decisions to be taken by the Cabinet (“non-key decisions”). Preparation of the forward plan helps the Council to programme its work. The purpose of the forward plan is to give plenty of notice and an opportunity for consultation on the issues to be discussed. The plan is updated each month with the period of the plan being rolled forward by one month and republished. Copies of the plan can be obtained from Democratic Services, Walsall MBC, Council House, Walsall, WS1 1TW craig.goodall@walsall.gov.uk and can also be accessed from the Council’s website at www.walsall.gov.uk. The Cabinet is allowed to make urgent decisions which do not appear in the forward plan, however, a notice will be included on the agenda for the relevant Cabinet meeting which explains the reasons why.

Please note that the decision dates are indicative and are subject to change. Please contact the above addressee if you wish to check the date for a particular item.

The Cabinet agenda and reports are available for inspection by the public 7 days prior to the meeting of the Cabinet on the Council’s website. Background papers are listed on each report submitted to the Cabinet and members of the public are entitled to see these documents unless they are confidential. The report also contains the name and telephone number of a contact officer. These details can also be found in the forward plan.

Meetings of the Cabinet are open to the public. Occasionally there are items included on the agenda which are confidential and for those items the public will be asked to leave the meeting. The forward plan will show where this is intended and the reason why the reports are confidential. Enquiries regarding these reasons should be directed to Democratic Services (craig.goodall@walsall.gov.uk).

“Key decisions” are those decisions which have a significant effect within the community or which involve considerable expenditure or savings. With regard to key decisions the Council’s Constitution states:

- (1) A key decision is:
 - (i) any decision in relation to an executive function which results in the Council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant, having regard to the Council’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates or
 - (ii) any decision that is likely to have significant impact on two or more wards within the borough.
- (2) The threshold for “significant” expenditure/savings is £500,000.
- (3) A decision taker may only make a key decision in accordance with the requirements of the Executive Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of this Constitution.

**FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS
APRIL 2024 TO JULY 2024 (04.03.2024)**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reference No./ Date first entered in Plan	Decision to be considered (to provide adequate details for those both in and outside the Council)	Decision maker	Background papers (if any) and Contact Officer	Main consultees	Contact Member (All Members can be written to at Civic Centre, Walsall)	Date item to be considered
20/24 (4.3.24)	<p>Walsall Proud Programme: Next Stages of Transformation</p> <p>This report details the key outcomes, achievements and progress of the Council's Proud transformation journey and outlines the approach to service transformation going forward.</p>	Cabinet Non-key decision	Caroline Brom Caroline.Brom@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	20 March 2024
18/24 (4.3.24)	<p>Public Sector Equality Duty:</p> <p>To note the Public Sector Equality Duty annual report which will be published in March 2024 in accordance with our obligations with the Equality Act 2010.</p>	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Karen Griffiths Karen.Griffiths@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	20 March 2024
7/24 (5.2.24)	<p>Darlaston Long Term Plan for Towns:</p> <p>To authorise the Executive Director for Resources and Transformation, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, to act as</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Philippa Venables Philippa.Venables@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	20 March 2024

	Accountable Body for the Darlaston Long Term Plan for Towns.					
8/24 (5.2.24)	Fixed Penalty Notices: Cabinet to consider law changes allowing the increase of penalties for litter, fly tipping and duty of care and approving the new penalty limits in Walsall.	Cabinet Key Decision	David Elrington David.Elrington@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Perry	20 March 2024
9/24 (5.2.24)	West Midlands Local Transport Plan Settlement and Transport Capital Programme 2024/25: To approve the West Midlands Local Transport Plan Settlement and Transport Capital Programme 2024/25.	Cabinet Key Decision	Matt Crowton Matt.Crowton@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	20 March 2024
2/24 (8.1.24)	Acquisition of a Strategic Town Centre Development Site: To approve the acquisition of a strategic town centre development site. <i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>	Cabinet Key Decision	Nick Ford Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	20 March 2024
15/24 (5.2.24)	Acquisition of a Town Centre Property for Strategic Regeneration: To approve the acquisition of a town centre property for strategic development.	Cabinet Key Decision	Nick Ford Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	20 March 2024

	<i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>					
11/24 (5.2.24)	<p>Connected Gateway:</p> <p>To approve delegations to enable continued delivery of the external grant funded programmes/ projects in line with the agreed governance and assurance framework.</p> <p><i>This will include a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	20 March 2024
14/24 (5.2.24)	<p>Healthy Levelling Up Partnership:</p> <p>To agree to the Healthy LUP proposal and agree delegations to bring forward proposals for funding under the scheme.</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Simon Tranter Simon.Tranter@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	20 March 2024
17/24 (4.3.24)	<p>Strategic Acquisition in Pheasey:</p> <p>To approve the use of Compulsory Purchase powers to bring forward the development of a derelict site.</p> <p><i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i></p>	Cabinet Non-key decision	Nick Ford Nick.Ford@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew	20 March 2024
16/24 (14.02.24)	<p>Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy:</p> <p>To adopt a new strategy and establish a council led steering group to</p>	Cabinet Key Decision	Jaki Brunton-Douglas Jaki.Brunton-Douglas@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	20 March 2024

	undertake ongoing monitoring and annual update.		Black Country PPOSS - Overarching Strategic Framework Walsall PPOSS - Assessment Report			
65/23 (4.12.23)	Contract for Multiple Recyclable Materials: To award off-take and processing contracts for multiple recyclable materials. <i>This will be a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>	Cabinet Key Decision	Katie Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk Alan Bowley Alan.Bowley@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Murphy	20 March 2024
6/24 (8.1.24)	Alternative Provision Contract: To approve the award contracts for the provision of Alternative Education. <i>This will include a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>	Cabinet Key Decision	Laura Wood Laura.Wood@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	20 March 2024
58/23 (6.11.23)	High Needs Funding Formula 2024/25: To approve changes to the High Needs Funding Formula, as agreed by Schools Forum, to be used for the allocation of Dedicated Schools Grant – High Needs Block to schools in Walsall for the 2024/25 financial year.	Cabinet Key Decision	Richard Walley Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk	Schools Forum, Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	20 March 2024

59/23 (6.11.23)	Early Years Funding Formula 2024/25: To Cabinet approve the Early Years Funding Formula, as agreed by Schools Forum, to be used as the allocation of funding to early years providers in Walsall.	Cabinet Key Decision	Richard Walley Richard.Walley@walsall.gov.uk	Schools Forum, Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	20 March 2024
46/23 (4.9.23)	SEN Place Requirement: To approve finance for additional special educational needs school places.	Cabinet Key Decision	Alex Groom Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr M. Statham	20 March 2024
14/23 (6.2.23)	Growth Funding for Schools: To enable the Local Authority to fulfil its duty to secure sufficient primary and secondary school places, through the adoption of a policy for the application of revenue funding for school growth.	Cabinet Key Decision	Alex Groom Alex.Groom@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services, Schools Forum	Cllr M. Statham	20 March 2024
66/23 (4.12.23)	Waste Management Strategy Update - Fryers Road Household Waste Recycling Centre redevelopment (HWRC): That Cabinet approve the pre-tender budget for the redevelopment of a larger Fryers Road HWRC and agree to use the Pagabo framework (design and build stages) for the procurement of Fryers Road HWRC.	Cabinet Key Decision	Katie Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk Stephen Johnson Stephen.Johnson@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Andrew Cllr Murphy	17 April 2024

67/23 (4.12.23)	Council Plan 2022/25 – Q3 23/24: To note the Quarter 3 2023/24 (outturn) performance against the Markers of Success in the Council Plan 2022/25.	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Elizabeth Connolly Elizabeth.Connolly@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Bird	17 April 2024
20/24 (4.3.24)	Protective Characteristics for Care Leavers: To agree that ‘care experience’ be treated as if it were a Protected Characteristic under the Equalities Act 2010, so that decisions on future services and policies made and adopted by the council consider the impact on people with care experience.	Cabinet Key Decision	Zoe Morgan Zoe.Morgan@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Elson	17 April 2024
13/24 (5.2.24)	Multifunctional Devices leasing contract: To consider the award of a 5-year contract for the leasing of multifunctional devices (MFDs) and production print devices. <i>This will include a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>	Cabinet Key Decision	Sharon Worrall Sharon.Worrall@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Ferguson	17 April 2024
19/24 (4.3.24)	Compact Sweeper Hire Contract: Award of contract for 5 hired compact sweepers (plus a spare) for 6 years. Street Cleaning – Clean & Green.	Cabinet Key Decision	Den Edwards Den.Edwards@walsall.gov.uk	Internal services	Cllr Murphy	17 April 2024

	<i>This will include a private session report containing commercially sensitive information.</i>					
21/24 (4.3.24)	Healthwatch Contract Extension: For Cabinet approval to extend the current contractual arrangements for Healthwatch under Reg 72 to allow for full design, tendering and implementation.	Cabinet Key Decision	Grace Charles Grace.Charles@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Pedley	17 April 2024
10/24 (5.2.24)	Surveillance and Access to Communications Data: To review the authority's performance as regards directed surveillance and to approve an updated policy for surveillance and the interception of communications data.	Cabinet Key Decision	David Elrington David.Elrington@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Perry	17 April 2024
12/24 (5.2.24)	Walsall Safer Streets – Palfrey Big Local and General Update: To cover the work of Palfrey Big Local, their resident led approach and the outcomes they have achieved.	Cabinet Non-key Decision	Paul Gordon Paul.Gordon@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services Palfrey Big Local	Cllr Perry	17 April 2024
57/23 (6.11.23)	Walsall Net-Zero 2041 Climate Strategy: To approve the Walsall Net-Zero 2041 Strategy.	Cabinet Key Decision	Katie Moreton Kathryn.Moreton@walsall.gov.uk	Internal Services	Cllr Flint	July 2024

Black Country Executive Joint Committee
Forward Plan of Key Decisions

Published up to June 2024

Date Created	Key Decision	Contact Officer	Main consultee	Date of meeting
	No decisions scheduled.			



West Midlands Combined Authority

Forward Plan

Forthcoming key decisions

Title of key decision:	Decision to be taken by and date:	Open or Exempt:	Portfolio Lead	Employee to contact:
<p>Arrangements for Mayoral Question Time with MPs To agree the arrangements for mayoral question time sessions with the region's MPs.</p>	WMCA Board 14 June 2024	Open	Andy Street Mayor of the West Midlands	Jonathan Gibson Head of Policy & Public Affairs
<p>Penalty Fares for Midland Metro Following public consultation, to agree a new penalty fare amount and to consider moving to a proposed two-tier penalty structure, where the fee amount will reduce for early payment.</p>	WMCA Board 14 June 2024	Open	Councillor Mike Bird Portfolio Lead for Transport	Chris Hopkinson Owner Representative - West Midlands Metro
<p>Private Sector Representation To consider retaining existing private sector representation on WMCA boards until such time as the future Single Settlement governance structure is known.</p>	WMCA Board 14 June 2024	Open	Councillor Stephen Simkins Portfolio Lead for Economy & Innovation	James Hughes Member Relationship Manager
<p>Bus Options Report To consider options for the future delivery of the region's bus network.</p>	WMCA Board 19 July 2024	Open	Councillor Mike Bird Portfolio Lead for Transport	Steven Hayes Head of Network Transformation
<p>Key Route Network Review 2023/24 To approve the amended Key Route Network within the WMCA area.</p>	WMCA Board 19 July 2024	Open	Councillor Mike Bird Portfolio Lead for Transport	Rachel Ing Corridor Manager

The Forward Plan

This document sets out known 'key decisions' that will be taken by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) over the coming months.

Forthcoming key decisions are published online to meet the statutory 28 day notification rule for each meeting where a key decision will be taken. Where it has not been possible to meet the 28 day rule for publication of notice of a key decision or an intention to meet in private, the relevant notices will be published as required by legislation as soon as possible.

What is a key decision?

A 'key decision' means a decision of the Mayor, WMCA or officer which is likely:

- (a) to result in the WMCA incurring expenditure, making savings or generating income amounting to £1m or more; or
- (b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the WMCA

The report relating to a decision, together with any other documents being considered, will be available five clear working days before the decision is to be taken (unless the documentation contains exempt information).

The forward plan also provides notice of when the WMCA may decide to exclude the press and public during consideration of a particular matter due to the potential for disclosure of confidential or exempt information. The grounds upon which local authorities can exclude the press and public are specified by law and details of the exempt categories are available on request from the Governance Services team (governance.services@wmca.org.uk).

Councillors or members of the public wishing to:

- make a representation about why a matter should be heard in public, or
- submit information to the decision-making body about an item in the forward plan, or
- request details of relevant documents, or
- seek advice about the WMCA's decision-making arrangements,

should contact the Governance Services team: governance.services@wmca.org.uk