

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Date of meeting:	03 March 2021
Title of Report:	Child Exploitation Update and Child Evidence
Lead Member:	Councillor Jemima Laing (Cabinet Member for Children and Young People)
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Children's Services)
Author:	Siobhan Wallace
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Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	No
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

Information in response to a request from Panel

Recommendations and Reasons

Information only

Alternative options considered and rejected

Information only

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

Relates to Caring council agenda-

- Keep children, young people and adults protected.
- Focus on prevention and early intervention.
- People feel safe in Plymouth.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Information only

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

No issues identified

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

This relates to risk management for the young people at risk of child exploitation in Plymouth. Child exploitation has a significant adverse impact on vulnerable and socially isolated young people, including children in care.

Appendices

*Add rows as required to box below

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Definitions of child exploitation							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

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Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Alison Botham											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes - Alison Botham by email Date agreed: 22/02/2021											
Cabinet Member approval: Yes - Cllr Jemima Laing by email Date approved: 22/02/2021											

1.0 Introduction

This briefing report has been produced at the request of Scrutiny Panel to provide an update on Child Exploitation issues within Plymouth. It builds on the previous report to Scrutiny Panel dated 09 11 2019 (appendix A). Definition of Child Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation are appended for ease and reference. The report gives an overview of how agencies respond to child exploitation in Plymouth. It goes on to give an update on identification and screening, and gives examples of recent initiatives overseen by the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation group.

The report goes on to explain the city-wide plan to launch the Adolescent Safeguarding Framework, which is an outcomes focussed initiative to develop new ways of working with young people, and will be of particular relevance to our young people at risk of exploitation. This is described in section 5, which includes a case study.

Finally this paper provides a response to questioning from Scrutiny Panel about processes and support for children giving evidence in criminal and civil cases.

2.0 Partnership Roles and Responses to Child Exploitation Work

- 2.1 The oversight of work with child exploitation in Plymouth currently rests with the Plymouth Local Safeguarding Children. Safer Plymouth also maintain oversight of a number of strands of this work, in particular reporting online abuse, as part of their role to address cyber-crime and fraud. This is progressed by the strategic Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation subgroup of the Plymouth Safeguarding Children partnership, chaired by the Barnardo's. Under this sits an Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group, which meets fortnightly and considers emerging patterns and concerns regarding individual or groups of children, offenders and locations, and plans disruption activity.
- 2.2 All children and young people who go missing are offered return home interviews. These gather information and a child exploitation screening tool is undertaken. Any child or young person where the threshold for significant harm or high-level child in need is met is referred to the Children Young People and Families Service for assessment, support and safeguarding. A single assessment is undertaken to ascertain their needs and plan support and safeguarding interventions.
- 2.3 Barnardos run a BASE project, offering support and recovery work to young people affected by child exploitation. This includes young people engaged with statutory safeguarding services as well as children in need. Other services such as CAMHS, NSPCC and Firstlight can also offer therapeutic support and intervention as part of their sexual abuse services.
- 2.4 Where an individual or group of individuals poses a risk to children and young people, a strategy discussion is held and actions are identified to safeguard the young person. Alongside this, police colleagues can undertake a range of activities to disrupt the behaviours of the alleged perpetrator. This may include triggering a full-scale police operation, leading to the arrest and sentencing of offenders. The Operational Missing and Child Exploitation subgroup will also initiate a range of disruption, diversion and prevention activities.

2.5 Some young people can be both victims and perpetrators of child exploitation. In some cases these young people also receive Youth Offending Team intervention.

3.0 Identification

3.1 Relaunch of the Child Exploitation Screening Tool

Over the course of 2019/20 it became apparent that there was limited use being made by the partnership of the Child Exploitation Tool, other than by Barnado's BASE project or the REACH team. The tool was reviewed by Plymouth Safeguarding Partnership and relaunched. For young people referred to Children Young People and Families Service following the Joint Targeted Area Inspection the initiative was taken that all children over 11 years should be screened for child exploitation using the screening tool. In December we were able to launch an online version for Children Young people and families staff, which means we are now starting to be able to pull reporting data to inform multi-agency service development.

Since 1st December, 183 child exploitation screening tools have been completed. Of these 183, 96 young people remain actively open to Children Young People and Families Services. 11 have been identified as high risk, 25 as medium risk, 42 as low risk and 18 as no risk. A piece of work is underway to review the children at high risk to ensure their plans and assessments reflect the level of risk and include appropriate interventions to safeguard and support them from child exploitation.

3.2 REACH information relating to children who go missing from home or care

REACH work is undertaken by specialist workers within the Early Help Advice and Assessment Team within Children Young People and Families Service. Young people who go missing are offered return home interviews, and a child exploitation screening tool is undertaken. Where there is an indication of medium/high risk and the child is open to Children Young People and Families, the tool is sent to the social worker, who is responsible for the plan of work. If the child is not open, a referral is made to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and subsequently the Early Help Advice and Support Team worker is part of any strategy meetings around the young person.

Of the 276 screening tools completed so far this year-

121 indicated a Child Sexual Exploitation risk, of which:

- 19 (7%) - indicated high risk
- 50 (18%) - indicated medium risk
- 52 (19%) - indicated low risk

155 indicated a Child Exploitation risk, of which:

- 8 (3%) - indicated high risk
- 68 (25%) - indicated medium risk
- 79 (29%) - indicated low risk

32 indicated no risk Child Sexual Exploitation or child exploitation.

In most instances, where a child is deemed to be medium/high risk, they are associating with known persons of concern and also found in the company of other young people who are not being reported missing by their parents or carers. All young people reported as missing are reported to the Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group which meets fortnightly and serves as a channel to

share information re risks of child exploitation for young people in Plymouth. Any new child exploitation concerns are considered and diversion or disruption activities put in place where required.

Agencies also bring other young people for whom there are child exploitation concerns to be discussed. 15-20 additional young people are discussed each month, often being identified as associating in groups.

Locations of concern are monitored to disrupt risk to our young people, often using 'Pop Up' visits by the Community Connexions Youth Service, with assistance from Police and other multi-agency colleagues.

3.3 Joint investigation of risk of child exploitation

Where a young person or group of young people is considered to be at risk of significant harm, a strategy discussion is held with the police. This considers whether there needs to be a joint investigation into any criminal offences and any safeguarding issues. The strategy discussion can also consider specific activity to disrupt locations and alleged perpetrators.

There is one ongoing high level police operation into child exploitation concerns in Plymouth, concerning around 20 offenses committed in 7 locations. This is a complex piece of work and is unlikely to go to court until early next year. There is a multi-agency silver and gold group overseeing this investigation and ensuring support is in place for the victims and witnesses.

4.0 Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group

4.1 COVID response

Throughout COVID the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group has sought assurance across the system that children and young people at risk of or experiencing child exploitation are supported. This has included the Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group increasing from bi-weekly to weekly sessions for a period of time during the initial lockdown.

In July 2020, the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group heard from Plymouth City Council Youth Workers about the 'Pop Up' model that undertakes reconnaissance work in the community before disruption and delay interventions are deployed. Examples of multi-agency work with the police have been provided to the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group. Since July intelligence from both the Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group and Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group has been used to inform multi-agency responses using the 'Pop Up' model.

4.2 Key activities

Following local intelligence, the Chair and Business Manager updated the Designated Safeguarding Leads in November regarding the sharing of self-generated images by young people. This included sign-posting to key resources and programmes, and encouraging wider discussions within schools to aid a proactive and preventative approach.

An application was submitted to Research in Practice for their 'Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme' to aid the development and implementation of Plymouth's Adolescent Safety Framework.

Although not successful, their response reflected that our application showed 'integration and collaboration across voluntary, community, statutory and non-traditional partners, as well as buy in from strategic leaders'.

The Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group meeting in December received the initial analysis from the Harmful Sexual Behaviour audit which has been led by the NSPCC. The findings indicate significant inconsistencies across the system, including a good awareness and knowledge of harmful sexual behaviour, understanding thresholds and a mixed response regarding the strength of multi-agency working. Next steps include collating a comprehensive action plan which will be presented to the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group in March 2021.

As part of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection action plan, the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group has seen an increased use of the Child Exploitation screening tool. This continues to be monitored through the group.

Members of the Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group have met with the Young Safeguarders three times:

- Twice to discuss knife crime and influencing education across schools. This session involved key data from the police.
- Once to discuss the Adolescent Safety Framework.

The Joint Targeted Area Inspection raised the issue of professionals using inconsistent and potentially victim-blaming language. Agencies – particularly health – have reported they have seen an improvement of the use of language following undertaking case audits. The Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership multi-agency child exploitation programme addresses victim blaming and trauma informed language.

5.0 Adolescent Safety Framework – a whole systems response to extra-familial harm for older children and young people.

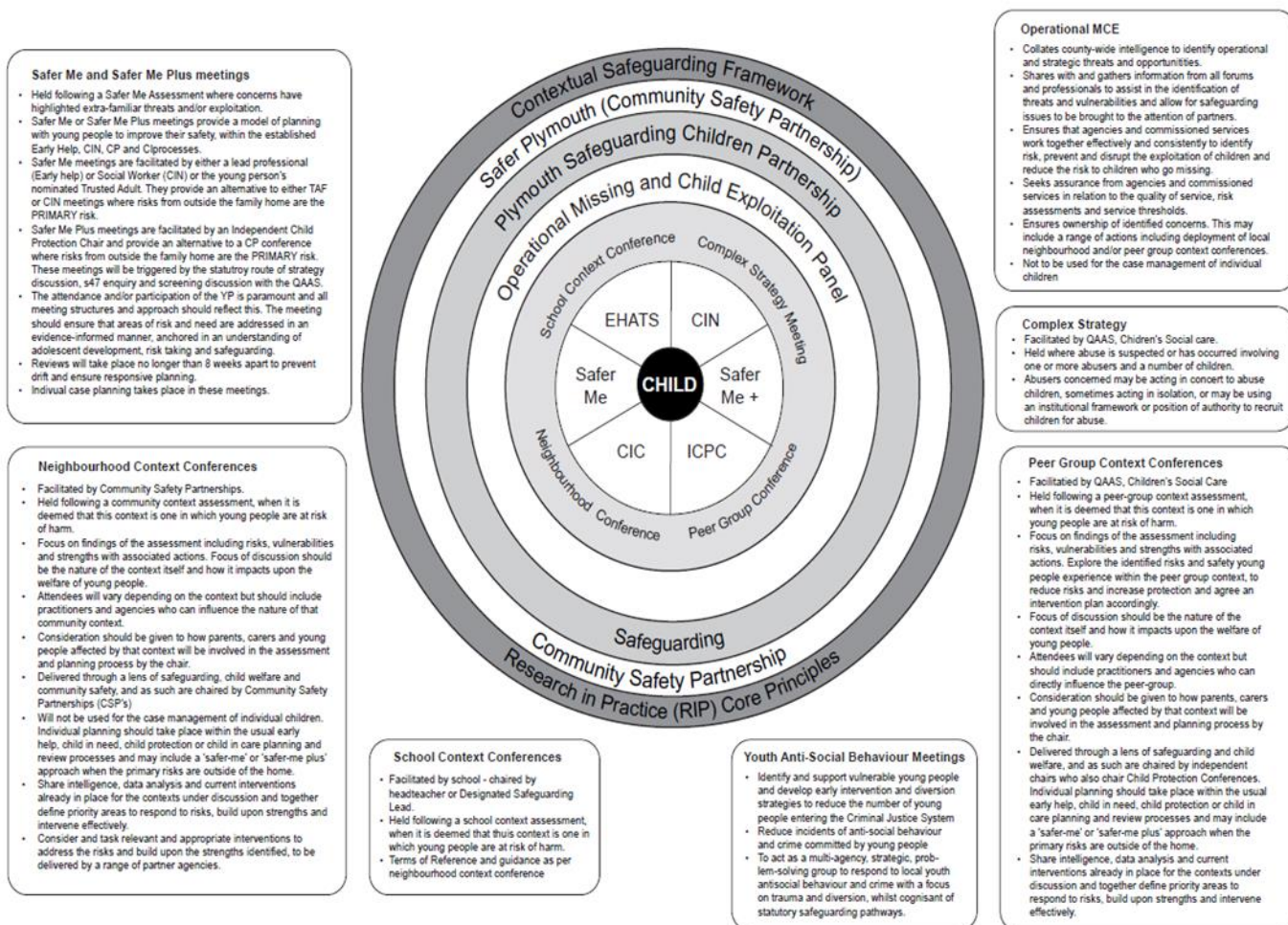
The Adolescent Safety Framework is a practice response to exploitation and other complex safeguarding issues facing adolescents. The Strategic Missing and Child Exploitation Group continues to lead the development of the Adolescent Safety Framework.

Key challenges have been identified in the single and multi-agency response in Plymouth to extra-familial harm, and there is a need to create a unified and truly partnership approach. The Adolescent Safety Framework outlined in this briefing note is currently in use across Devon and is the result of two years of research and development. It has received positive endorsement from multi-agency reference groups, Research in Practice, the Contextual Safeguarding Network, Safer Devon Partnership and Community Safety Partnerships. Since the outset, consideration has been given to its utility as a regional approach.

The Adolescent Safety Framework should allow services to respond more clearly and decisively to the challenges of extra-familial harm and exploitation, but even with it, we will not have 'fixed the problem'. The Adolescent Safety Framework approach has a strong focus on system change, rather than just process roll-out. The first 12 months of any new approach needs to be understood as a learning phase and will require continued brave and supportive leadership which empowers the partnership to make mistakes together and share collective responsibility.

5.1 The Framework

Adolescent Safety Framework • Multi-agency Coordination



The Adolescent Safety Framework has been developed from nationally recognised best practice and evaluated models. A commitment to Restorative and Strengths-based approaches underpin it.

The framework includes:-

- An underpinning theoretical approach to multi-agency work with extra-familial risk
- A revised and unified model of multi-agency coordination.
- A clear pathway for the assessment of need and provision of help.
- A comprehensive toolkit for professionals.
- A comprehensive suite of guidance and Terms of Reference for all meetings and key elements of the model.
- A multi-agency workforce training plan.
- A monitoring and evaluation plan.

It offers a single and holistic approach to assessment of individual children, peer groups, neighbourhood, location or person/ people of concern that guides the assessor to the correct

pathway/action through the identification of vulnerabilities, behaviours, environment, relevant concerns and indicators as well as protective factors. A single coordination hub will be created in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), to ensure timely individual safeguarding; provide threshold stability; map and analyse received information; and ensure connectivity between key forums

The model works at the individual level through Safer Me and Safer Me Plus (Child Protection) meetings designed to ensure a strong focus on contextual / extra-familial risks, maximise the participation of the young person and focus on collaboration with them to cultivate safety. Peer Group, Neighbourhood (Location) and School Context conferences will be facilitated by independent Safeguarding Chairs (specialised Child Protection Chairs), Community Safety Partnerships and Head-teachers or Designated Safeguarding Leads respectively. These conferences provide a mechanism to coordinate interventions and improve safety in the context of concern.

5.2 Intended outcomes

The Adolescent Safety Framework is intended to ensure children and young people are safe within the contexts that influence their lives – home, school, peer group and community and that, in broadening our approach to child protection and safeguarding, we meet the new requirements in Working Together 2018.

The Adolescent Safety Framework creates strong conduits between strategic, operational and practice levels so that as a City and Local Authority, we have a clear picture of the threats and opportunities for young people in our area, services are coordinated to respond in the most appropriate way and strategic and commissioning decisions reflect the real needs of young people.

The Adolescent Safety Framework will improve confidence and knowledge across the partnership so that interventions with young people are earlier, evidence-led, purposeful, collaborative and joined up both with young people themselves, their families, partner agencies and non-traditional safeguarding partners in our communities. This increased effectiveness will result in fewer young people needing statutory services.

The Adolescent Safety Framework provides an opportunity for a stronger foundation for improved responses to cross-boundary challenges and improved safety for children as they naturally move between geographical areas.

5.3 Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership Development of Adolescent Safety Framework Case Study

I. The concern

- I.1 In November 2020, concerns started to grow about a number of children and young people within the Barne Barton and St Budeaux area. Intelligence from Plymouth Community Connection Youth Workers and Devon & Cornwall Police Neighbourhood teams showed that young people were spending considerable time in and around the area with increasing incidents of anti-social behaviour.

- 1.2 Reports were coming in from the police and neighbouring businesses that suggested that harmful activity was taking place. As well as anti-social behaviour, there were adult persons of concern, drug and alcohol misuse, criminal exploitation and concerns of potential child sexual exploitation. The majority of these young people are currently or have been known to children social care.

2. Our Response

Understanding the context:

- 2.1 Plymouth had already started its journey on developing an Adolescent Safeguarding Framework response. Following conversation with PSCP senior leaders it was agreed that the PSCP should pilot the ASF approach to this particular location and peer group.
- 2.2 Previously the Plymouth response would be to identify individual children and young people and make individual safeguarding referrals. Initial information suggested that not all children would meet the thresholds for intervention, but their connection with the peer group, and the location itself could still present risk.
- 2.3 By using the Safer Me Assessment tool a multi-agency group were able to assess needs and impact of risk and harm at a contextual level (i.e. at peer and location) rather than being restricted to individual. This meant we were able to consider adolescent agency, locality based harm, peer influence, grooming and coercion as well as parental disengagement and lack of community guardianship. A wider lens was applied which is encouraging a child welfare response to what is happening as opposed to purely crime reduction or community safety.
- 2.4 It also provided greater understanding of the location itself, its ward profile and vulnerability, crime data, transport routes, businesses, security of spaces, and amenities. This is an immediate and new approach and one which can potentially increase the safety for all of those gathering and using local amenities.

Immediate action taken:

- 2.5 Plymouth is fortunate in that whilst not framed as “contextual responses”, it already benefits from services and activities which are contextual in nature. This means that multi-agency work force is already intervening to mitigate risk to and support young people, and each other, with dispersal and diversionary interventions, e.g. PL Kicks, Pop Up Youth, Child Centred Policing Team and Barefoot. The adult of concern is now subject to a community protection notice. Those individual young people with increasing concerns of risk of harm will be subject to the usual safeguarding referral systems and responses.

Immediate Learning

- 2.6 The anonymised Safer Me Assessment was presented to the PSCP Operational Missing and Child Exploitation Group where it has supported transferring a conceptual framework into a practical need and reality. It has engaged our multi-agency workforce and increased commitment to cultural and system change.

Police officers are feeling supported with a multi-agency workforce and structured approach to both the peer group and the neighbourhoods concerned.

3. Next Steps and New opportunities

3.1 A small task and finish group are now to undertake a ‘context weighting’ exercise. This means thinking about which context has the greatest influence over and risk to our young people. What needs to be addressed first to secure change for things to get better for our young people? In this case we will consider the peer group and the Barne Barton/St Budeaux location. Once weighted and assessed we will be able to identify and put in place interventions which target the contexts, as well as working alongside young people and local businesses. Examples are as follows:

Peer Group	Neighbourhood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restorative Justice • Bystander interventions • Pop up Youth work • Sports coaches and mentors • Peer mentors • Safety mapping and planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restorative Justice • Safety mapping and planning • Engagement with businesses and local residents • Community guardians • Licensing and Environmental support • Changing the physical environment • Updating business safeguarding policies and practices

3.2 Success shall be measured with reference to the nature of the context in which the harm has been occurring, rather than solely focusing upon behaviour changes displayed by the young people who are at risk in these contexts.

Tracey Watkinson
 Safeguarding Business Manager
 Plymouth Safeguarding Children Partnership



6.0 Other developments

The Adolescent Support Team went live in June 2020. This team contains specialist youth workers and family support workers, including specialist posts for intervening and supporting young people at risk of or experiencing CE. A Barnardo's Child Exploitation worker has been seconded into the Adolescent Support Team as a Family Support Worker until 31/03/22.

7.0 Support for young people giving evidence in court.

7.1 Young People accused of committing crimes

In most cases the Youth Offending Team is already informed of a young person appearing in court, and will be undertaking an assessment of their case and a making a recommendation. They offer support to the young person and their family /carers leading up to the hearing. Depending upon their age, vulnerabilities and past experience of court, the Youth Offending Team talk them through the hearing, including taking them into the court and explaining the processes, who sits where and the likely outcome. They also inform the court of any vulnerabilities.

Occasionally, young people are charged straight to court from police custody. In these cases, the Youth Offending Team see the young people in the cells at the court and explain the process to them.

7.2 Young People who are called as witness to a victim of crime

These young people are supported by the police Witness Support team. Depending upon their age or vulnerabilities, the Witness Support team will make recommendations to the court on the best way for the young people to engage in the process. This may include appearing behind screens, in a closed court or remotely via video link. Victims of crimes are offered similar support from the Victim Care team.

7.3 Young People in care proceedings

It would not be standard practice for young people to attend court during care proceedings: in fact this is discouraged due to the sensitive discussions that take place which could cause further distress to a young person. When a young person requests to speak to the Judge about their wishes and feelings before a judgement is made, they will be invited into the Judge's chamber. They would be supported by the court appointed children's Guardian and their solicitor.

If a party suggests that a young person should give evidence to the court, the Judge would balance the harm this would cause them. If the Judge agreed this was essential, special measures would be put in place, such as the young person giving evidence in a side room with video conferencing facilities. They could be supported by a professional who they have a good relationship with. This could be a family support worker, their social worker, the guardian, the National Youth Advocacy Service their base worker from Barnardo's and so on.

7.4 Young people giving evidence as victims of Child sexual abuse.

First Light are commissioned to provide specialist child Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (ISVAs). Their role is to support victims of sexual abuse through the process of reporting sexual abuse or violence and then through the court process. They also signpost to therapeutic services.

Siobhan Wallace Head of Service, Children Young People and Families Service

Nick Cook Assistant Director, Barnardo's Children's Services

Appendix A

1.1 What is CSE?

- 1.11 Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. Sexual abuse 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 clothing. It may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in the production of sexual images, forcing children to look at sexual images or watch sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).
- 1.12 Child sexual exploitation is a crime with devastating and long-lasting consequences for its victims and their families. Childhoods and family life can be severely affected, and this is compounded when victims, or those at risk of abuse, do not receive appropriate, immediate and on-going support. The first response to children, and support for them to access help, must be the best it can be from social workers, police, health practitioners and others who work with children and their families. Serious case reviews show that the language and approach of professionals is highly significant in influencing when and how children will tell adults that they have been abused. Insensitive language can place “blame” with the victim and result in them being seen, and treated by safeguarding professionals as “adults”.
- 1.13 The definition of child sexual exploitation is as follows:

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology¹.

- 1.14 Like all forms of child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation:
- can affect any child or young person (male or female) under the age of 18 years, including 16 and 17 year olds who can legally consent to have sex;
 - is still abuse even if the sexual activity appears consensual;
 - can include both contact (penetrative and non-penetrative acts) and non-contact sexual activity;
 - can take place in person or via technology, or a combination of both;
 - can involve force and/or enticement-based methods of compliance and may, or may not, be accompanied by violence or threats of violence;
 - may occur without the child or young person’s immediate knowledge (through others copying videos or images they have created and posting on social media, for example);
 - can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, males or females, and children or adults.
 - can be a one-off occurrence or a series of incidents over time, and range from opportunistic to complex organised abuse; and
 - is typified by some form of power imbalance in favour of those perpetrating the abuse. (Whilst age may be the most obvious, this power imbalance can also be due to a range of

¹ DfE, Child Sexual Exploitation. Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders, and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation (Feb 2017)

other factors including gender, sexual identity, cognitive ability, physical strength, status, and access to economic or other resources).

- 1.15 One of the key factors found in most cases of child sexual exploitation is the presence of some form of exchange (sexual activity in return for something); for the victim and/or perpetrator or facilitator. Exchange can include both tangible (such as money, drugs or alcohol) and intangible rewards (such as status, protection or perceived love or affection). It is critical to remember the unequal power dynamic within which this exchange occurs, and to remember that the receipt of something by a child/young person does not make them any less of a victim. It is also important to note that this can also be the prevention of something negative, for example a child who engages in sexual activity to stop someone carrying out a threat to harm his/her family.

1.2 What is Child Exploitation?

- 1.21 We know that children can be exploited in a number of ways other than sexual exploitation, including criminal exploitation (for example shoplifting to order), “County Lines” drug supply networks, or human trafficking. There can often be cross-over between different types of exploitation and the experience of a young person does not always fall neatly into one category. Increasingly policy makers and professionals have recognised this, and now refer to “Child Exploitation” rather than concentrating solely on child sexual exploitation in order to ensure all risks to children and young people from this activity are recognised.
- 1.22 In line with other LA areas nationally, Plymouth now considers child sexual exploitation as part of the wider concern of child exploitation.