



*From Strength to Strength*

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**Annual report of Strategic Safeguarding Service for**  
**Child Exploitation and Children Missing from Home and Care**  
**April 2023 – March 2023**

## **Purpose of the Report**

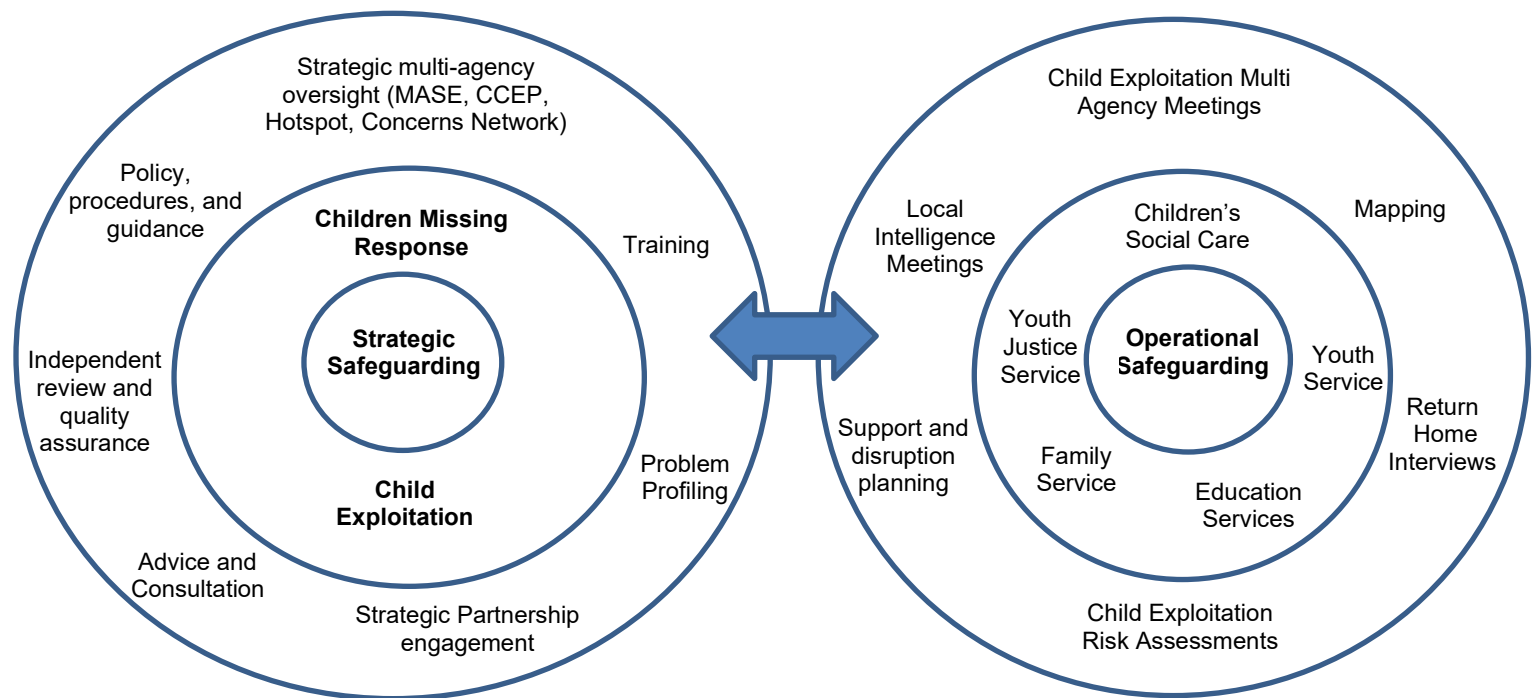
1. This is an annual report written for the Safeguarding Assurance and Information Group and the lead member for Children and Families. It provides an outline of the progress and challenges within the work being undertaken by the Local Authority and relevant partner organisations to child exploitation and children who go missing from home and care during the last year (April 2022-March 2023) and the commitments for the following 12 months.
2. Child exploitation and children missing from home and care continue to be a priority for the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (NSCP). Ofsted inspections of local authority children's services have a focus on local response and resources to address child exploitation and it is a particular area of focus in the annual self-evaluation that the local authority provides to Ofsted. In addition, joint targeted area inspections (JTAI) are taking place in respect of child criminal exploitation.
3. The Service Manager has strategic responsibility for child exploitation. The operational responsibility for work within Children's Social Care sits within the social work teams. The role includes having strategic oversight and offering support in respect of child exploitation across the wider system including early help and working with partner agencies.

## **Information**

### **Strategic Partnerships, Governance and Service Provision**

4. The Child Exploitation Steering Group (Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire) provides overarching governance for the various work streams for children where risk of harm is located outside of the family or home.
5. Currently work concerning children missing from home and care and child criminal exploitation is overseen by the County Missing Children Steering Group and the Child Criminal Exploitation Steering Group respectively both of which meet quarterly and take a strategic lead in the coordination of inter-agency work as defined in the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership/Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership joint procedures.
6. Statistical information for Child Exploitation and Children missing from home and care is reported quarterly to the Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

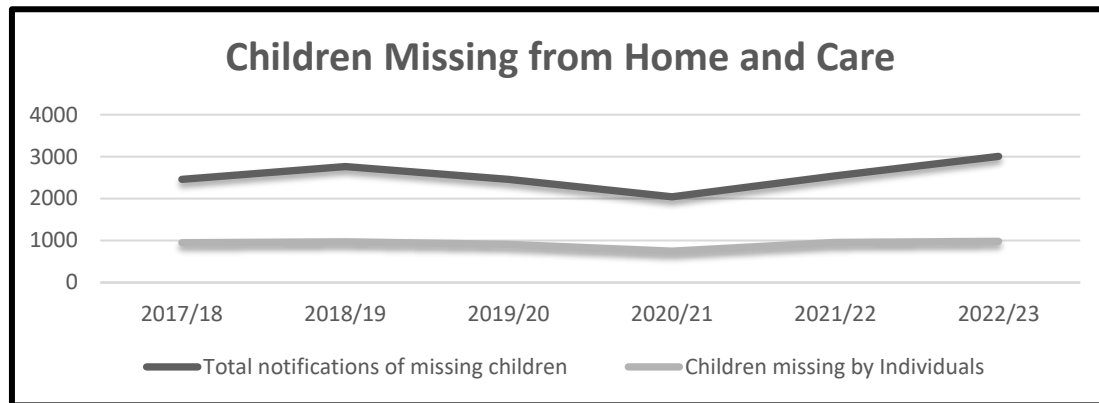
## Nottinghamshire's strategic and operational model for responses to children missing and child exploitation



7. The model above illustrates the whole system approach to addressing risks to children who go missing from home and care and child exploitation in Nottinghamshire. There is a strategic safeguarding team with responsibility for designing and co-ordinating the required response, and the mobilisation of the work is completed by operational teams including Children's Social Care, the Family Service and the Youth Justice Service.
8. Multi-agency child criminal exploitation procedures and child sexual exploitation procedures provide a joined-up process for supporting victims of exploitation and disrupting the perpetration of harm; these procedures are separate but aligned with Nottingham City's Safeguarding Children Partnership.
9. Nottinghamshire is committed to working together with partners to improve the lives and experiences of children, young people, and families by empowering them to make their own choices, being fair, open, and honest and building safe and nurturing relationships.
10. This includes children and young people who experience exploitation and go missing from home and care receiving a consistent multi-agency response focused on achieving the best outcome for the child and their family whilst reducing the risk.
11. Exploitation requires a different response to child protection. Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire and partners are committed to using the nationally recognised Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Principles to underpin all practice (see paragraph 23). [Multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm \(researchinpractice.org.uk\)](https://researchinpractice.org.uk)

## How We Work and What We Do

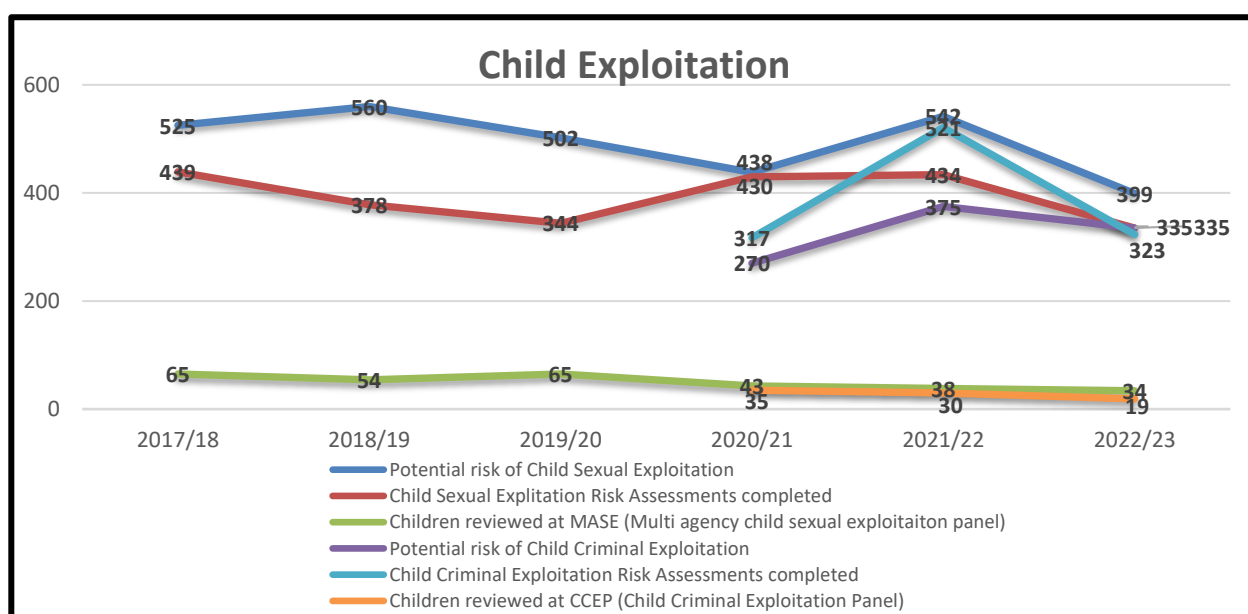
### Children Missing from Home and Care



12. The number of missing incidents has increased slightly for the year 2022/23, though the individuals this relates to has remained stable (detailed data found in **Appendix 2**, Table 1)). A small number of children have repeatedly been reported missing during this period and those children have been subject to the strategic oversight of the Multiple Missing and Hotspots panel. Most children who go missing abscond from home (approximately 0.4% of the child population in Nottinghamshire) but children in care are at an increased risk of going missing due to their adverse childhood experiences and disruption to family life; 19% of Nottinghamshire County Council's children in care population have been reported missing in the year 2022/23.
13. On most occasions, children who go missing are found at the home of a friend or relative, or at a known location and found within 4hrs. Most children are not harmed during their missing episode but a small number of children who go missing are harmed. From information gathered during Return Home Interviews (RHI), the main risk issues identified for children include adults who may pose a risk to children, sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, and offending behaviour. The main reasons provided by children in care and at home for going missing is due to boundary issues and conflict within family relationships. RHI's are requested for all children after they have been found to establish the reason for their missing incident, and to assess if there have been any additional safeguarding concerns.
14. Regular multi-agency meetings are requested for children who go missing more than 3 times in 90 days which seeks to work with the family to process the reasons for the missing incidents and identify support for the child and carers. A monthly 'multiple missing and hotspots' meeting is held to provide strategic oversight for children most at risk of missing which includes intelligence sharing of any patterns of concern around the County. When risks associated with child exploitation are identified, the group will require assurances that there are plans in place to support the child and disrupt the harm.
15. A recommendation from the last annual report was to introduce a scheme which would provide better information about children in care who go missing called the 'Philomena Protocol'. The purpose of the protocol is to be aware of the children in residential care who at risk of going missing and have a good understanding of the important people in their lives and places they

might run away to. The Philomena Protocol has now been implemented and though in its infancy, has been well received. Further improvements could be made for children in care from other local authorities hosted by Nottinghamshire County Council, so that we have a consistently clear understanding of children's missing risks who are placed in Nottinghamshire by another local authority. According to information gathered about missing incidents via Police reports and RHI's for 2022/23, 18% of children missing from home and care were 'at risk' of exploitation. Police systems are in place to identify children at risk of exploitation and so this increases the level of missing risk and therefore response provided. It is particularly important that when a child in care goes missing, their level of risk of exploitation or harm should be clearly understood so that every effort to find the child can be made at the earliest opportunity.

## Child Exploitation



16. Reports of child exploitation has decreased for the year 2022/23 (detailed data found in **Appendix 2**, Tables 2&3). A similar pattern has been noted by other local authorities across the East Midlands region. A Police Problem Profile for Nottinghamshire has not been produced yet this year and so there is no available Police data to corroborate crimes investigated by Nottinghamshire Police.
17. The 'potential risk of child exploitation' figures above are taken from notification flags recorded across a range of referrals and assessments. Children who are exploited are often vulnerable due to adverse childhood experiences and therefore, although a child may present as vulnerable, this does not necessarily mean the child is impacted by exploitation. Child exploitation risk assessments are completed when there are reported incidents or indications of exploitation; it is therefore appropriate that the completed risk assessment figures are fewer than the flags for 'potential risk of exploitation'.
18. According to data gathered by Nottinghamshire County Council, lower-level threats of child exploitation have been flagged in all districts of the County. Children at the highest levels of risk from child criminal exploitation are discussed at the monthly Child Criminal Exploitation

Panel (CCEP) and those reviewed are in the main from the Gedling and Rushcliffe districts, notably areas that border Nottingham City. Children at the highest levels of risk from sexual exploitation are discussed at the monthly Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) panel and those discussed have primarily been based in the Mansfield and Ashfield areas. Consequently, resources have been focused on these areas including targeted work by the Tackling Emerging Threats to Children team in schools and Police led Neighbourhood Safeguarding and Disruption (NSD) meetings in those districts. Work is currently underway within the Police to extend the NSD model in all districts of the County as this provides better local information sharing and tailored localised responses in collaboration with district-based partners.

19. The response to child exploitation is now well embedded across the Pathway to Provision though most mature at tiers 3&4. When a child is identified at a medium or high risk of exploitation then partner agencies promptly come together around the child to provide support and disrupt the harm but the challenge for Nottinghamshire is to develop a consistently robust response to vulnerable children on the cusp of exploitation. At a participation day (April 2023) to ascertain the views of operational staff who work across the spectrum of the Pathway to Provision, colleagues expressed that they were confident about identifying signs of exploitation and thought the strategic oversight of children at the highest risk of exploitation provided strong support and direction but would like to see better analysis and problem profiling for children at the cusp of exploitation.
20. **Nottinghamshire's ambition** for children at risk of exploitation is to be able to recognise indicators of child exploitation at the earliest opportunity and intervene to support children and their families at risk of harm whilst disrupting any suspected exploitation. Work is currently underway to review and further develop Nottinghamshire's response to child exploitation via the multi-agency collaboration of a cross partnership steering group between Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council. Like other local authorities around the country, Nottinghamshire recognises the need to review its structural and cultural response to the evolving threat of child exploitation. The aim of this development work is for children to feel safe in their local communities and to equip colleagues with the confidence and skills to respond using a strengths-based and trauma informed approach.

## Training and Workforce Development

21. Multi-agency training for child exploitation and children missing from home and care is offered via the NSCP and is available through e-learning packages and virtual training sessions. Appetite for the training remains positive from a cross section of partners including children's social care, schools, foster carers, Police and early help services. Continued training for colleagues is an essential element of Nottinghamshire's strategy to equip colleagues with the knowledge and skills to respond to child exploitation with understanding and confidence.
22. A Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) support programme was commissioned by the Department for Education in 2019 to develop a set of multi-agency Practice Principles for responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. They are designed to support effective partnership working across different local contexts, providing a common language and framework to better respond to child exploitation and extra-familial harm. These have been recently published and Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire are committed to embedding the evidence-based principles into practice. These principles complement the

commitment of Nottinghamshire County Council to embrace strength-based practices and a trauma informed response to children and families impacted by abuse and neglect.

## Voice and experiences of children, young people and their families

23. A notable strength of Nottinghamshire's response to child exploitation is the support offered to children and families impacted by child sexual exploitation. Nottinghamshire continues to commission a specialist service from The Children's Society to provide this work. 66 children have been supported by the service for the year 2022/23 and 97 parents attended online parenting sessions with an additional 16 parents having engaged in direct parenting work with the team. This is the feedback from a young person who accessed the support offered by The Children's Society:

*'To be honest, if it wasn't for the hospital and The Children's Society, I probably wouldn't be here. I don't think I would. My mum helped me a lot, but she knew that I needed a lot more than she could give me. My mum had my sister to look after as well. My mum's not a professional, she only knows what she knows.'* (Aged 15yrs)

24. Added value from The Children's Society contract has involved bespoke training to the Police Sexual Exploitation Investigation Unit in how to effectively support and engage victims and also to colleagues working in residential children's homes to strengthen the response of those providing a caring role to children who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation given childhood experiences and disruption to their family lives and relationships.
25. Children impacted by child criminal exploitation would equally benefit from the level of support provided by this project which is currently being considered.
26. The voices and experiences of children and young people who are exploited or go missing from home and care is an area of focus for development over the next 12 months.
27. This work will include gathering the views of children, young people and their parents about their experience of our services and to use this to inform improvement and development of practice and services across the system.

## Supporting Best Practice

28. In addition to The Children's Society, Nottinghamshire benefits from specialist support and collaboration with colleagues from Barnardo's and the National Working Group. The knowledge and expertise from these organisations provide support and guidance to strategic thinking and operational responses, setting out expectations and challenge for best practice. This collaboration has been particularly helpful for some Nottinghamshire children who have been exploited across borders with a wider network of partners and projects working across the country to enable continuity of support to the child and disruption of harm in other areas.
29. Nottinghamshire is also part of an East Midlands regional group which is chaired by one of the regions Directors for Children's Social Care and is a forum to share best practice. Operational

staff are regularly provided with details of additional training opportunities and best practice guidance such as via the #LookCloser Campaign and other resources available to assist them in their work.

## Evidence of Challenges

30. Anecdotal information from strategic oversight panels have noted that a significantly high number of children listed for review have neurodiverse conditions including autistic spectrum conditions and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This has also been raised by The Children's Society as programmes of support have required adaptation to meet the needs of these children. Children with neurodiverse conditions are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and further work is needed to develop a better response for these children both reactively and proactively. Neurodiversity impacts differences in social preferences, ways of learning and ways of communicating or perceiving the environment. As such, the concept of exploitation may have the appearance of safety and security rather than risk and danger.
31. Whilst support for children impacted by exploitation is improving, further work is required to strengthen efforts to disrupt exploitation including the prosecution of offenders. The Government produced a child exploitation disruption toolkit in 2019 which sets out a range of disruption tactics for those working to safeguarding children from sexual and criminal exploitation and these options need to be exhausted. These include tools and powers available to District Councils as well as legislation that can be used by the Police. There are examples of excellent practice and creative thinking by Local Districts, but this is not consistent or well communicated strategically within the partnership. It is often the case that suspected perpetrators of sexual exploitation remain undisrupted as there is an overdependence on children providing Video Recorded Interviews for sexual offences; children who have experienced significant trauma are unable and/or fearful of engaging with this process.
32. Work to address child exploitation in Nottinghamshire tends to be reactive and there is a need for better profiling of children at risk of exploitation and other contextual safeguarding analysis. Development in this area could produce a much more proactive response which could prevent incidents of child exploitation through early identification of patterns of concern.

## Reflecting on our Achievements

What we said we would do in 2021/22	What we did in 2022/23
Embed the use of the Philomena Protocol for children placed in care in Nottinghamshire who are at risk of going missing and review its impact over the coming year.	Complete – see paragraph 12 for further details
Agree the vision and strategy for addressing child exploitation	A vision and values document has been agreed by the group and development work is underway to review the



across all levels of the Pathway to Provision through the Child Exploitation Cross Partnership Group.	current systems in place to address child exploitation. Progress has been slower than anticipated but there is a strong will by the group to develop a response that seeks to prevent child exploitation and recognise the harm and trauma experienced by children impacted by exploitation.
Promote the use of a trauma informed approach across the partnership for supporting children and families impacted by child exploitation.	Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council Violence Reduction Unit produced a Trauma Informed Strategy in 2022. This complements Nottinghamshire's commitment to strengths-based practice and work is currently in development to implement this approach. The principles of a trauma informed approach are being used in the work to develop Nottinghamshire's response to child exploitation. The impact for victims of exploitation is that they are seen as children first.
Raise the profile and significance of a community safety approach to child exploitation.	Progress is being made to increase connectivity between county wide intelligence and local area responses. The NSD model has been seen to be particularly effective in addressing local threats to children and work is being done to develop the use of this model further.

## Our commitments for the next 12 months

The response to tackling child exploitation is an ever evolving and complex picture that requires a flexible system and creative practice with a skilled and knowledgeable workforce to meet the needs and protect those children, young people and their families who are affected. Earlier this year together with Nottingham City we began a piece of work to further develop our responses. This work will shape our commitments for the next 12 months:

- To undertake a self-assessment of Child Criminal Exploitation in line with the JTAI criteria and the National Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Safeguarding Children at Risk of Criminal Exploitation. We will use this to better understand the developments since the 2021 audit and to drive an action plan for further practice improvements.
- To form stronger strategic relationships and governance with partners and Nottingham City including a re-launch of the cross authority steering group on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2023.
- Consideration of a Police led exploitation team with co-location of partners.
- To embed the TCE principles that is trauma informed.
- A commitment to learning from the experiences of children and young people and parents who have experienced exploitation.
- To improve methods of disruption and consistency of practice across district councils.
- A stronger response to children and young people at risk of exploitation at an earlier stage.

The steering group will develop a detailed action plan in relation to the above ambitions and the measures for progress.