



Vulnerable Adolescents

Tackling Risk and Exploitation Strategy
2023-25

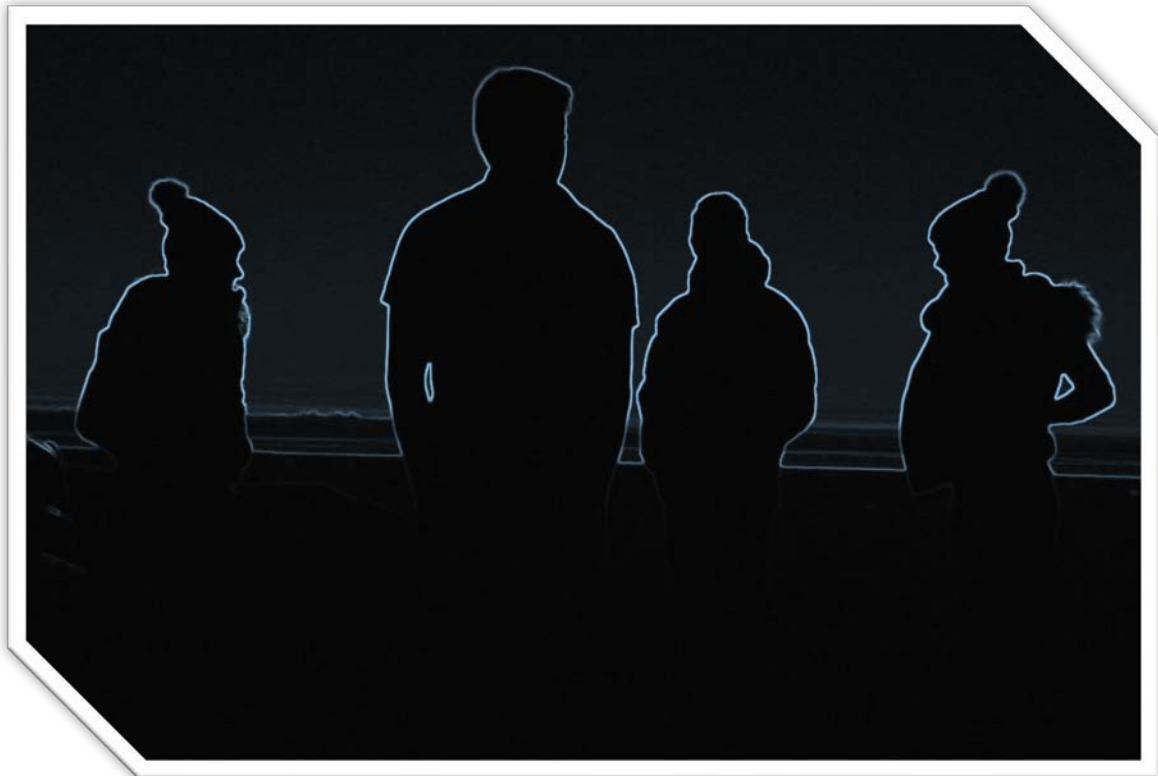


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1. Introduction

Safeguarding adolescents is a continued area of focus for the Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership (CSCP). Camden has a multi-agency approach to tackle the risks faced by vulnerable adolescents, who are increasingly understood to be susceptible to abuse and exploitation. Our strategy outlines the partnership's response to address the risks faced by vulnerable adolescents through thinking about the context in which many Camden young people live their lives and the complex and overlapping factors that can contribute to their increased vulnerability. This Strategy supports the [CSCP multi-agency guidance on extra-familial harm](#) which was launched in 2022.

The aims of the multi-agency Vulnerable Adolescent Strategy links with Camden Council's 2025 goal to protect the most vulnerable in our society; reduce levels of crime and support children to grow up feeling safe; with access to services that enables them to develop all their capabilities.

The CSCP's Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy Group maintains the strategic coordinated oversight of the partnership's response. The work of the group is across three key areas of exploitation. They include:

- **harmful sexual behaviour and child sexual exploitation (CSE);**
- **youth violence, child criminal exploitation (CCE) including trafficking/ modern slavery;**
- **and radicalisation and forms of extremism leading to terrorism.**

In acknowledgement of the nationally recognised success of Camden's multi-agency Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) strategy, the Vulnerable Adolescent Strategy Group has taken the same five-pillar approach to tackle wider exploitation of children. Our plan is based on information and intelligence provided by multi-agency partners via the Multi-agency Child Exploitation group (MACE), and by a robust case audit of practice on CSE/ CCE cases. Surveys and participation activities have also informed our understanding of adolescent experiences in Camden. *Prevent, identify, support, disrupt and enforce/prosecute* make up the framework, which underpins the multi-agency strategic action plan:

- 1) **Prevent** exploitation or reduce risk to those susceptible to exploitation. Ensure awareness remains high, by providing information to improve understanding of the issues related to adolescent exploitation. This is with the aim of promoting adolescents to make safe choices, develop healthy behaviours/relationships and build resilience against exploitation.
- 2) **Identify** and refer adolescents who need help and support, gathering effective multi-agency information and intelligence. Focussing on early identification to provide help to those who are vulnerable to exploitation or are targeted, groomed or involved exploitation.
- 3) **Support** victims and those at risk of exploitation so that they are able to exit from the abuse and get help to address any issues that make them vulnerable to exploitation. Ensure frontline professionals understand the local risks and 'stay with' the victims/ perpetrators to help them break free from exploitation by promoting a safeguarding culture where professionals are able to work with young people in a manner that is curious, compassionate and non-judgemental.

- 4) **Disrupt** the patterns of exploitation and make Camden a safe environment for adolescents. Use local and national learning to ensure a highly coordinated multi-agency approach to disruption by interrupting the activities of perpetrators and inhibiting the targeting and grooming process.
- 5) **Enforce/ Prosecute** perpetrators where possible using information and intelligence gathered by partner agencies. This includes bringing together tactical and operational strategy to ensure that partners exercise their full powers to disrupt and prosecute perpetrators.

In response to best practice, the Vulnerable Adolescence Strategy Group has retained its strong engagement from local Police at strategic and operational levels. The Safeguarding Lead/ Detective Superintendent for Camden and Islington Basic Command Unit (BCU) continues to co-chair the multi-agency group with the DCS/ Deputy Chief Executive of Camden Council. There is good multi-agency representation at meetings, with partners from, schools, health, police, the voluntary sector and a number of services from the local authority in attendance.

Grooming and child sexual exploitation has risen within the national agenda in recent years, but it is felt that child criminal exploitation (CCE) and the grooming of adolescents in the illegal drugs trade is only just beginning to be seen through a safeguarding lens.

Although this strategy sets out our objectives and aims on how vulnerable adolescents are safeguarded and protected in Camden, the following reports and areas of development should also be considered to provide a holistic approach:

1. Vulnerable adolescents action plan
2. Youth Safety Taskforce Report
3. Camden Youth Justice Three Year Strategic Plan
4. Camden Youth Mission

Ofsted inspection of Children Services, Camden Council (April 2022) commended the partnership response as being 'Outstanding'; *"Children at risk of, or who have experienced, exploitation receive a well-coordinated multi-agency response, and when children go missing the response is intelligent and compassionate. There is effective strategic oversight of children at risk of exploitation, and regular tracking of progress through risk assessments and response meetings that mobilise safety planning and disruption. The missing and child exploitation analysts have good oversight of cases throughout and inform various pathways to risk reduction at the operational multi-agency child exploitation meetings."*

The Camden Youth Safety Taskforce report (2018) brought to our attention that, for some local young people, fear of crime and violence has become part of their daily life. The report analysed data on young people with a caution/ conviction and found strong links to deprivation, with a significant proportion of the cohort having experienced sustained family dysfunction, with over half having experienced neglect. Camden has a well-established and widely-known drugs market which the evidence makes clear is an aggravating factor in youth violence in the borough. The Youth Safety Taskforce heard how boys especially, are groomed into gangs and the drugs trade from a young age. We know that many young people affected by youth violence may have

suffered trauma in their early childhood and it is often the most vulnerable young people who are most at risk. The Youth Safety Taskforce led to the development of 17 recommendations based on *prevent, identify, support, disrupt and enforce/prosecute*.

Ofsted inspection of Children Services, Camden Council (April 2022) commended the partnership response as being 'Outstanding'; *"Practitioners and senior leaders identify potential harm and respond quickly with services that are designed by and with the community. This approach has been highly effective in reducing incidents of knife crime and violence. Similarly, practice has been developed to address the risks of child exploitation effectively ..."*

CSCP are committed to tackling the threat of extremism and intolerance. Camden accessed Home Office funding for 4 years (2017-2021) to employ a Counter Extremism Community Partner. The Community Partner worked with communities to embed approaches to countering the broader harms linked to extremism. Camden also has a hate crime strategy which goes beyond the protected characteristics of; Race, Religion, Disability, Nationality, Sexual Orientation or Transgender Identity, to tackle all forms of intolerance including those against gender, income status, age etc. Camden Prevent Team is closely aligned with Hate Crime partners and the former Counter Extremism Community Partner.

Prevent works cross departmentally to ensure that a safeguarding approach is applied to adults and children. Governance board to ensure the broader context of Preventing violent extremism and building resilience is understood and embedded across the work of the council. Updates on preventing extremism and intolerance are regularly presented to governance boards and senior officers from Community Safety and Supporting People work cross-departmentally over this safeguarding area. This includes the work of the Channel Panel and initiatives undertaken to raise awareness of radicalisation, extremism and to build resilience.

Camden's Channel Panel effectiveness was rated green by the Home Office in 2021-22. A further review of the effectiveness was undertaken by Prevent Education Manager and SO15 including comparison with other boroughs and scrutiny of safeguarding structures in place. The steering group concluded; *'children in Camden are not being left vulnerable to radicalisation'*.

Working together to safeguard vulnerable adolescents

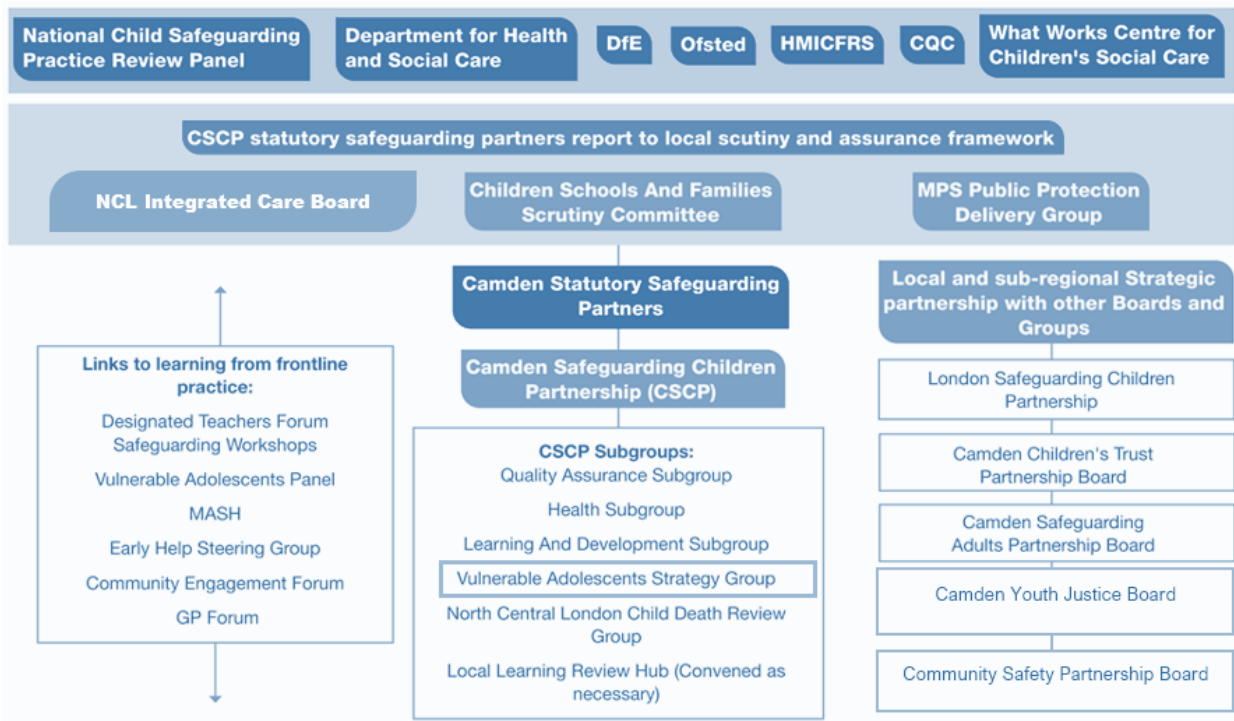
In order to safeguard children and young people it is vital that there is close collaboration by all partner agencies working with the child and their family. However, there may be occasions where agencies working with children and families in Camden disagree on how best to keep them safe and promote their welfare. Therefore, the CSCP has an established escalation policy to support practitioners resolve professional differences. [Escalation Policy - Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership CSCP.](#)

2. Definitions and our Camden approach

2.1 Multi-agency leadership and connectivity in delivering joint priorities

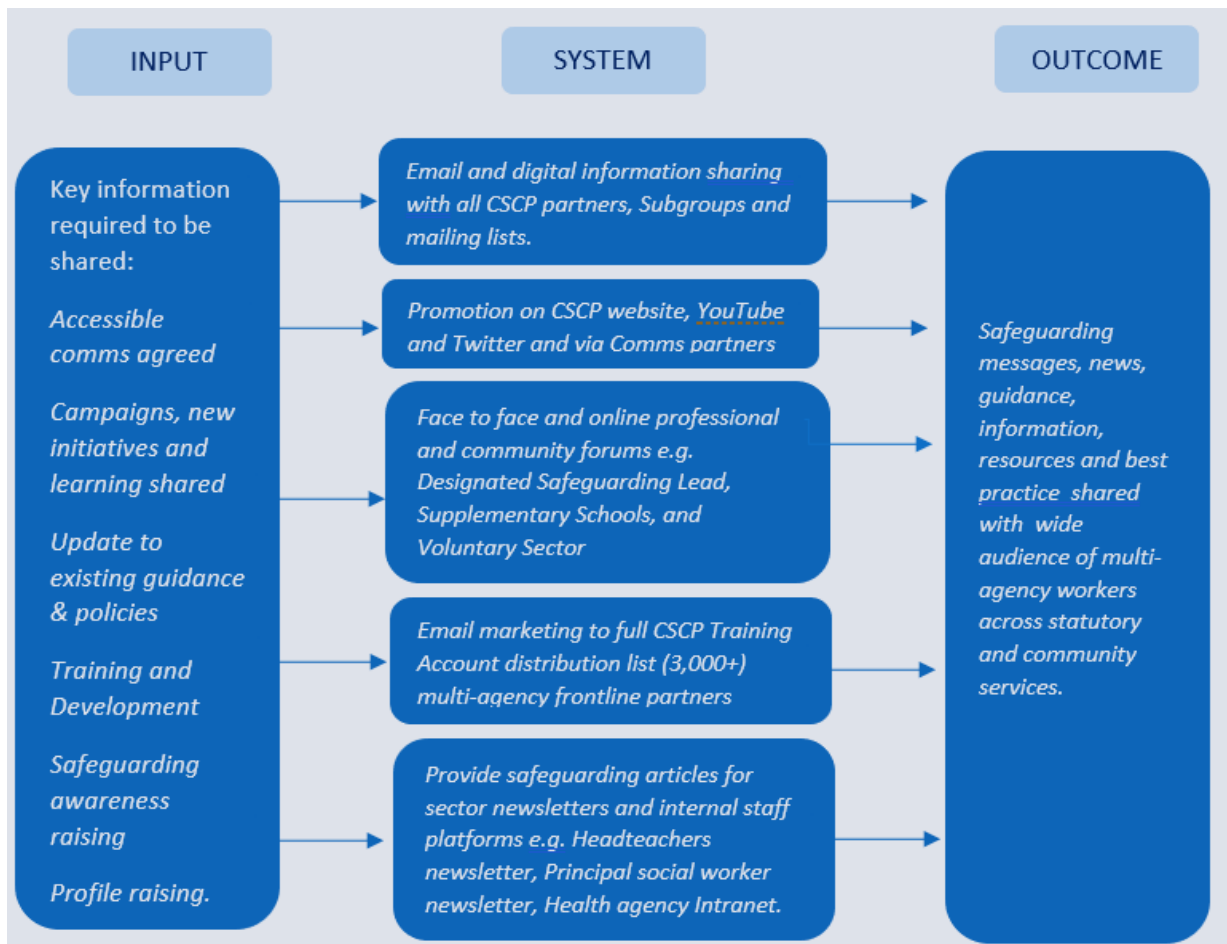
The CSCP’s Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy Group maintains the strategic coordinated oversight of the partnership’s response to ensuring the safety and welfare of adolescents. Cross-membership of our statutory safeguarding partners in local and pan London strategic boards, has enabled visibility and endorsement of our safeguarding priorities.

For example, the aims and the five-pillar approach of the Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy have been mirrored across several strategic multi-agency boards and articulated within Camden Council’s 2025 Plan to protect the most vulnerable in our society; and Camden Youth Justice Three Year Plan to reduce levels of crime and support children to grow up feeling safe; with access to services that enables them to develop all their capabilities.



Our strategy also includes ensuring the senior leaders and those with political and strategic influence are well briefed on national and local developments. Joint quarterly safeguarding performance and impact reports to the leader of the council and the chief executive enable the sharing of joint analysis and communication of overarching narrative across key safeguarding priorities and learning from case reviews and safeguarding audits.

This methodology is further mirrored throughout the different multi-agency strategic boards based on their varying terms of reference. Information flows depicts the connectivity and delivery of joint priorities so that key information reaches frontline services and the community.



The CSCP commissions an Independent Scrutineer to act as a *Critical Friend* to the statutory partners to maintain impetus on the delivery of the Action Plan to ensure that that learning from partnership activities translates into frontline practice and improves outcomes for vulnerable adolescents. [CSCP Arrangements](#) and CSCP [Annual Reports](#) detail this. Since 2019, the CSCP Young Advisors, have enriched our partnership's approach to safeguarding governance and assurance by strengthening the links between our safeguarding arrangements and the lived experiences of local young people. The Young Advisors and share their voices and lived experiences as Camden adolescents on emerging safeguarding and wellbeing issues. This has included involvement in our audit programmes and local and national reviews. Further details of their work can be found on our [website](#).

2.2 Adolescence

The term adolescence¹ is defined as the phase of life stretching between childhood and adulthood. In line with current social trends on life stages, and research on adolescent growth, it is increasingly thought of as the years between 10-24.

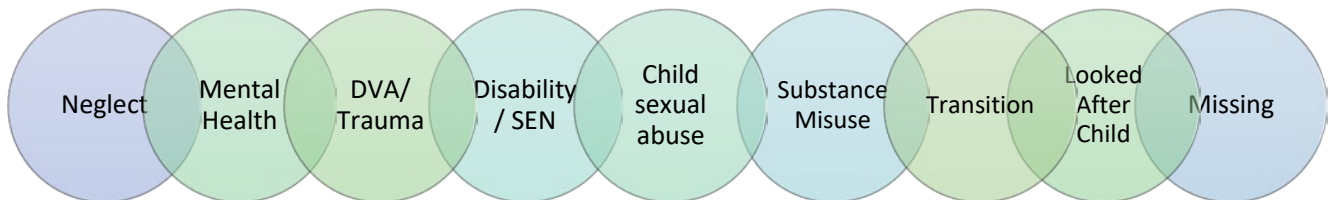
2.3 Vulnerability

The concept of vulnerability is applicable to all people who are more exposed to risks than their peers. We know that the vast majority of vulnerable adolescents have suffered trauma or family

¹ Sawyer, Azzopardi, Wickremarathne and Patton, *The age of adolescence*, The Lancet, (2018)

dysfunction in their early childhood, and that it they that are often the most vulnerable and most at risk of abuse.

This area of work has been, and continues to be, one of the Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership's priorities and the Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy Group ensures there is multi-agency commitment and a joint whole system response. The strategy sets out Camden's partnership approach to working with adolescents at risk because of cross-cutting vulnerabilities that make them more susceptible to multiple forms of exploitation.



2.4 Harmful sexual behaviour

Harmful Sexual Behaviour² (HSB) is developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour which is displayed by children and young people, and which may be harmful or abusive. It can be displayed towards younger children, peers, older children or adults, and is harmful to the children and young people who display it, as well as the people it is directed towards. Harmful sexual behaviour can be understood to overlap with child sexual exploitation (CSE). This is a heightened area of focus due to the testimonies of peer-on-peer sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools which was investigated by Ofsted through the [Ofsted Review](#).

Technology assisted HSB (TA-HSB)³ is sexualised behaviour which children or young people engage in using the internet or technology such as mobile phones and encompasses a range of behaviours including:

- viewing pornography (including extreme pornography or viewing indecent images of children)
- sexting

The CSCP aims to address these dual identities to empower and enable frontline workers to identify and respond to particular behaviours an adolescent may be exhibiting. In 2018, Camden published multi-agency guidance and protocol to help professionals in the children's workforce provide a balanced response to incidents of harmful sexual behaviour. New to 2021-22 included a bespoke multi-agency safeguarding training offer focusing on peer-on-peer sexual harassment in addition to bespoke sessions made available to all Camden schools. Safeguarding in schools was also the identified theme for the Section 11 audit in 2020-21, which provided further assurance on the actions being undertaken by schools to address peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

² <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/harmful-sexual-behaviour/> Hackett, S (2014). Children and young people with harmful sexual behaviours. London: Research in Practice.

³ Hollis, V. (2017) The profile of the children and young people accessing an NSPCC service for harmful sexual behaviour: summary report. [London]: NSPCC.

We recognise that LGBTQ+ children and young people face the same risks as all children and young people, but they are at greater risk of some types of abuse and exploration. For example, if an LGBTQ+ adolescent hasn't come out, or feels that their gender identity or sexuality needs to be kept secret, perpetrators can take advantage of this to prevent them from telling anyone about the relationship or to coerce them into meeting offline without telling anyone else. Thus be more vulnerable to sexual abuse, online abuse or sexual exploitation (Barnardo's and Fox, 2016; McGeeney et al, 2017; Xu and Zheng, 2014).

Working in partnership with sexual health services, schools and education, the aim is for all adolescents to improve their sexual health outcomes, through receiving good-quality sex and relationship information and education, at home, at school and in the community. This includes enabling them to access confidential advice and support about wellbeing, relationships and sexual health. An aspect of this includes equipping adolescents to understand consent, and unhealthy / abusive relationships.

2.5 Child Sexual Exploitation

Working Together (2018) defines Child sexual exploitation as; *“a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.”*

A young person defined CSE as follows:

*“Someone taking advantage of you sexually, for their own benefit. Through threats, by bribes, violence, or humiliation, or by telling you that they love you, they will have the power to get you to do sexual things for their own or other people's benefit or enjoyment (including: touching or kissing private parts, sex, taking sexual photos)”.*²

2.6 Grooming and Child Criminal exploitation

Grooming represents the process of someone building a relationship with a child, to coerce and exploit them. It may take the form of a romantic relationship, a friendship or as a mentor or authority figure.

The Children's Society definition of child criminal exploitation from young people; 'when someone you trusted makes you commit crimes for their benefit'.

Grooming can happen online, in person or both and groomers may also form relationships with wider friends and family to build trust. In some cases, children are enticed to take part through

⁴ As defined by the Young Women's Group New Horizons (2008) – Nia Project & The Children's Society

manipulation and the promise of reward, and in other cases violence and threats of violence play a more direct role in how control is exerted. Coercion and violence go hand in hand in cases of exploitation. Criminal exploitation can include forced theft, handling of illegal items such as weapons, and drug dealing including the county lines model.

There can be many intersectional aspects to grooming which can increase risk to harm and exploitation. For example, evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ children and young people might be at increased risk of some forms of harm. LGBTQ+ relationships are underrepresented in educational resources and the media (Barnardo's and Fox, 2016). This means there are fewer examples of relevant, healthy relationships available to LGBTQ+ young people, and it might be easier for an abuser to groom them into believing an abusive relationship is normal.

The Home Office defines child criminal exploitation⁵ 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. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. Criminal exploitation of children... includes for instance children forced to work on cannabis farms or to commit theft'*.

2.7 Modern slavery

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 outlines Modern Slavery as an umbrella term, encompassing human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour. Modern Slavery is typified by a means and a purpose, where a person is deceived, coerced, forced, or threatened for an exploitative purpose. This might include sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, benefit fraud, slavery or forced labour. For Human Trafficking, the Means and Purpose is preceded by an Act, where the individual is recruited, transferred, harboured, or received as part of their exploitation. Where the individual is aged under 18 years, the Means is not required, so using a child for an exploitative purpose always represents Modern Slavery. A person is not able to consent to their own exploitation and they may often not understand that they are a victim. Moreover, exploitation need not have taken place yet to constitute Modern Slavery, it is the purpose to exploit which is recognised. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is the Home Office mechanism for identifying victims of Modern Slavery. First responders, including Local Authorities and the Police, have a statutory responsibility to refer potential victims of Modern Slavery to the NRM. In Camden we were one of the first adopter sites for the Home Office's devolved decision-making pilot. We hold a joint NRM decision making panel with Islington Council, and work closely with the Home Office through its delivery and quality assurance.

2.8 Serious Youth Violence

Youth violence is a complex issue involving many different underlying and triggering causes and can occur in many different contexts. Violence towards or between children and young people is often associated with gangs, exploitation, and criminality. However, it can also occur between and within groups, peers and friends. The vulnerability and causes of violence can also overlap.

⁵ JTAI - Protecting children from criminal exploitation, human trafficking, and modern slavery (November 2018).

Camden recognises that identifying this spectrum is essential to providing the right support and intervention for children and young people at risk.

2.9 Contextual Safeguarding

During adolescence, the nature of the risks faced by young people, and the way that they experience these risks, often differs from earlier childhood – as do their needs. Specifically, young people may be faced with a new set of complex risks – ones not posed by families, but instead by peers, partners, and adults unconnected to their families. The duty to understand how exploitation may manifest, means understanding how Camden young people live their lives. Working Together (2018) calls for frontline agencies to consider contextual safeguarding, i.e. the vulnerability to risk and abuse faced by adolescents in a range of social contexts outside of the family setting. From Camden staff feedback, we know that frontline workers find it challenging to work with teenagers - with sexual exploitation, youth violence, gang involvement and drug running coming to their attention. For the young people affected, there can be serious personal consequences including criminality, harmful sexual behaviour, violence, serious injury, trauma, substance misuse and self-harm. Our [Young Advisors produced a film](#) to share their views and thoughts on contextual safeguarding in Camden.



2.10 Radicalisation and extremism

‘Radicalisation’, defined in the Prevent Duty 2015 as the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and forms of extremism leading to terrorism. Extremism has been defined as “the vocal or active opposition to our fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. We also regard calls for the death of members of our armed forces as extremist.” (Counter-Extremism Strategy, 2015).

In Camden we recognise that extreme views may not lead to wider harms or to radicalisation but we also recognise that some views can be divisive, fracture cohesion and lead to an environment where our communities become vulnerable to exploitation of all forms.

Commonly, like with other vulnerable adolescents, those who are at risk of radicalisation may feel isolated, victimised or have experienced trauma. Radicalisers work by building on existing grievances or vulnerabilities, convincing people they can be part of something special. Later grooming them into cutting themselves off from their friends, family and support networks. We also cannot underestimate the ability of online technology/ social media platforms to enable grievance building and radicalisation without the need for a so called ‘radicaliser’ in the early stages.

The Prevent strategy in Camden takes a safeguarding approach, which aims to build resilience to radicalisation in all young people through developing critical think, tolerance etc. Where young people seem particularly vulnerable, resources and advice are available to support at the earliest

stage. Where there are particular concerns, support packages can be accessed through Camden’s multi-agency Channel Panel chaired by a Camden local authority senior safeguarding professional.

2.11 Resilient Families Approach

The Resilient Families programme has a focus on prevention and early intervention provided by the council and partners that include schools, police, health professionals, youth workers and the voluntary sector who work with children, young people and families. The aim is to reduce families’ dependency on services by focusing on what families need to help themselves and to be resilient in the face of challenges. The approach aims to ensure that families’ needs are supported as early as possible, before problems get worse. The Resilient Families programme, alongside *All Together Better* programme (a review aimed at promoting and improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people), aims to improve early intervention, access and integration across the network of support for children and their families.

2.12 Camden Integrated Adolescent Centred Approach

The Camden integrated adolescent approach is designed to improve outcomes for adolescents who are aged 14-18 as it recognises that risks become different and often complex for this group, but is part of a whole system approach. Our integrated adolescent centred approach sees a young person as an individual rather than a number of problems. It is a holistic approach to improve outcomes for children and young people by focusing their own strengths and those in their networks and communities. It recognises the key importance of developing strong and consistent relationships using both peers and professionals and using evidence-based interventions to achieve change. The approach encourages the development of skills and shared understanding across social care, youth offending, education and health services to provide effective and efficient support for all children and young people in contact with our services.

2.13 Trauma informed approach

Trauma informed approach asks us to think about our every interaction and adopt our professional approach to one that is curious and thinks about trauma. This is with the aim of understanding what lies behind the behaviours that are presented. This includes understanding and responding to the cultural identity and gendered contexts of young people and the community in which they live. The main aim of trauma-informed approach is to raise awareness among all staff about the wide impact of trauma and to prevent the re-traumatisation of clients in service settings that are meant to support and assist healing.⁶ This ethos links in very closely with Camden Council’s *resilient families* approach and promotes models of care that enable alternative and more flexible forms of access and engagement.

To embed this culture fully and to respond to Youth Safety Taskforce (YSTF) recommendation ‘Schools, youth workers and other professionals who work with young people should develop trauma informed practices.’ Funding was allocated to delivering trauma informed practice training to Camden schools, led by Camden’s Educational Psychology Service and Camden Learning. This project started in September 2019 and has secured funding until July 2022 and has

⁶ https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20170720_stateofmh_report.pdf.

successfully trained 27 schools by March 2023, with successful funding approved until July 2025, in order to work/have offered all schools the support and training. A joint package of training, audit and resources is offered to schools involved in this project. To strengthen this further multi-agency training is offered as part of the CSCP varied training programme and working with trauma in practice was an area of focus explored as part of CSSW Practice Week in June 2022.

'I am seeing... a real shift in thinking around the ways children behave and how staff/adults respond to children. A deeper sense of throughout towards our students.' **Camden Headteacher**

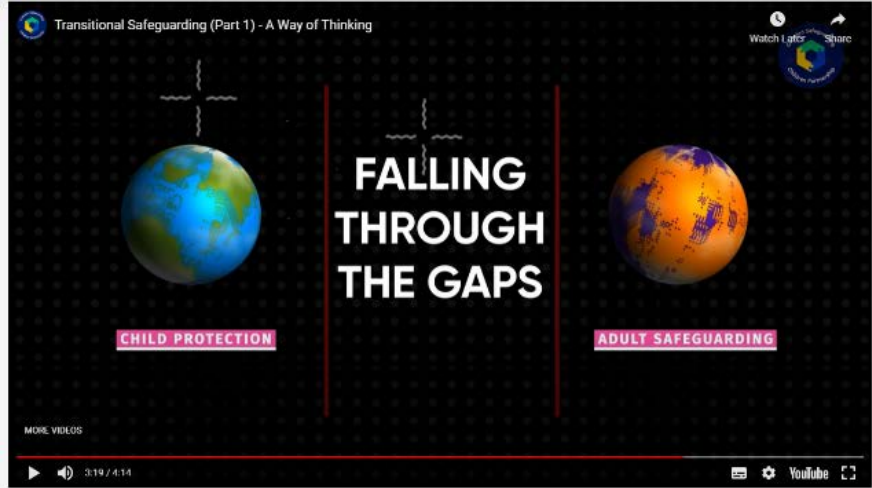
2.14 Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is an umbrella term for abuses which disproportionately affect women and girls, including Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment, Forced Marriage, Rape and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Camden is committed to ending VAWG and adopting a zero-tolerance policy to all instances of VAWG. We know that physical health and mental health is strongly interlinked with VAWG.

2.15 Transitional safeguarding

Transitional safeguarding is an emerging approach that challenges established models of safeguarding to think beyond the binary notions of childhood and adulthood. Transitional safeguarding acknowledges the complexities of safeguarding adolescents and is based on emerging research that if we can effectively meet the needs of adolescents, it may avoid later interventions, including those within the criminal justice system, acute health services and specialist drug and alcohol treatments. The transitional safeguarding cohort can have a high-risk profile, with entrenched issues. Learning from Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) has found that in many cases these young adults have often slipped through the net with no statutory involvement. Transitional safeguarding therefore challenges practitioners and leaders to think about how to develop resilience in order to safeguard adolescents fluidly across developmental stages to prepare them for adulthood. The CSCP has developed an [e-learning film](#) to develop multi-agency knowledge on transitional safeguarding.

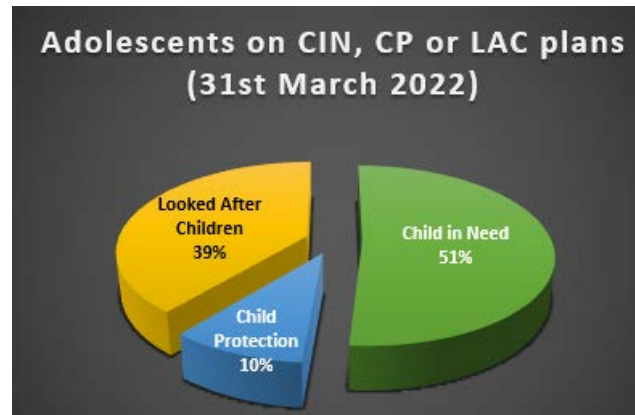
Over 2023-25 adult social care will be developing an integrated early help model for adults which will be aligned to the highly effective children’s early help model. Through universal and targeted services, a preventative approach will be offered enabling support to be provided at the right time to prevent difficult situations escalating. This offer would simultaneously improve outcomes for adolescents at transitional age who may not be eligible for statutory adult social care involvement.



3. Local context: Camden’s profile of Vulnerable Adolescents

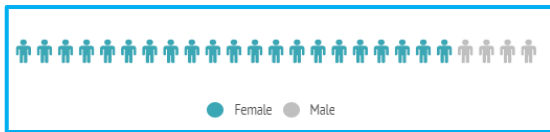
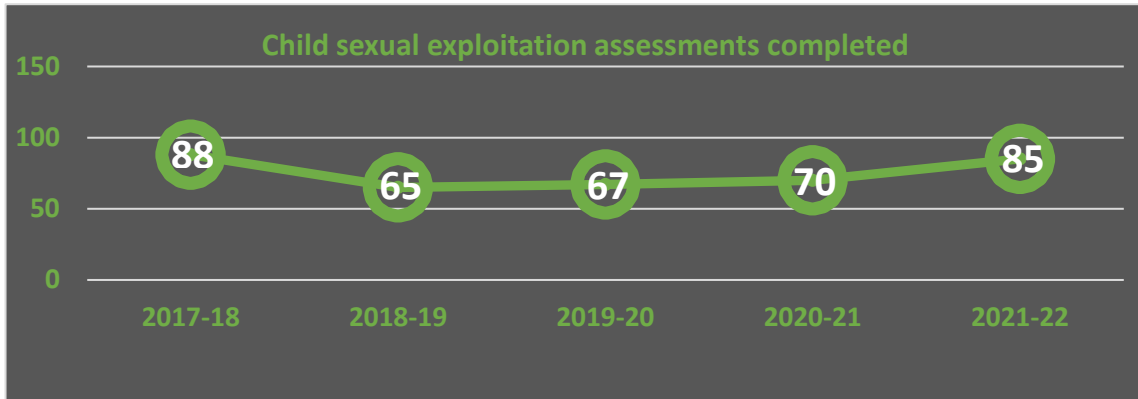
3.1 Proportion of adolescents known to Children’s social work

Paradoxically, there are significant inequalities in Camden, which can impact on the life chances of young residents. The average household income in the wealthiest ward is more than twice that of the average income in the least affluent ward. The problems faced by many adolescents are complex; often encompassing multiple vulnerabilities, with the lines between victim and perpetrator frequently blurred. Overall, there has been a year on year increase in the numbers of young people aged 14+ known to children’s social work and the chart below shows the distribution across children’s social work services.



3.2 Children at risk of sexual exploitation (CSE)

Partners have fed-back that close working across agencies has continued, and emerging intelligence is evaluated, and targeted interventions taken to engage with the young people. The number of young people known to the social work service who are at risk of CSE has increased in 2021-22. Trends seen in the chart below:

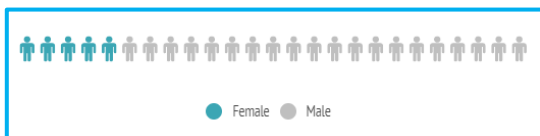
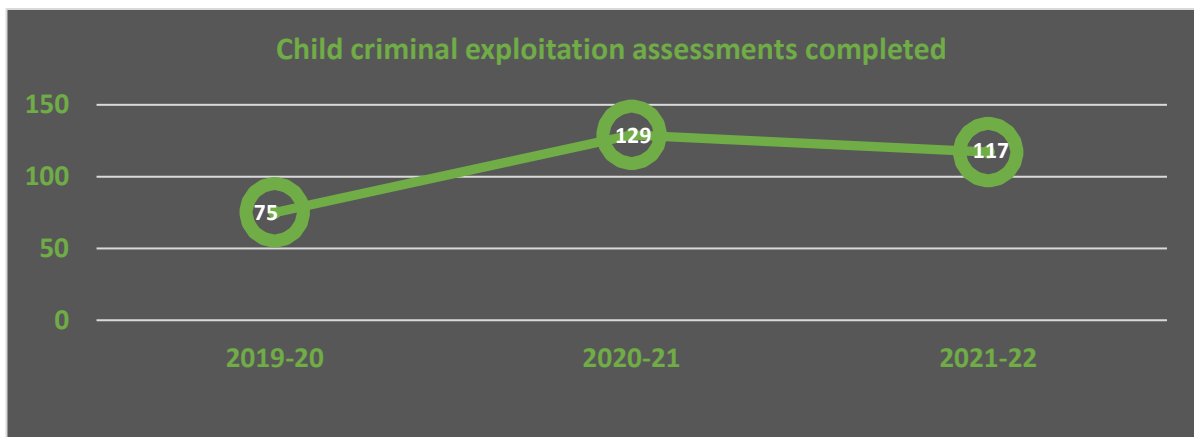


There has been an increase in males receiving a CSE risk assessment amounting to 17% of the total cohort, compared with 7% in 21/22.

Over 2021-22, online exploitation was the most prevalent model amongst 10 - 16 year olds, followed by peer exploitation and inappropriate relationships. Unstable family background/ history of abuse has continued to be the most prevalent vulnerability factor across the past 4 years. This trend would therefore promote the need to continue to support young people back in to, or to remain within education. 100% of the young people discussed at MACE have a bespoke safety plan and this has been stable since 2014-15. In 2021-22, 56% of CSE risk assessments reviewed at 6 months showed evidence of reduced risk.

3.3 Children at risk of criminal exploitation (CCE)

Since embedding of the CCE risk assessment tool, Camden has seen a progressive increase in the number of young people known to the social work service who are at risk of CCE. Trends seen in the chart below:

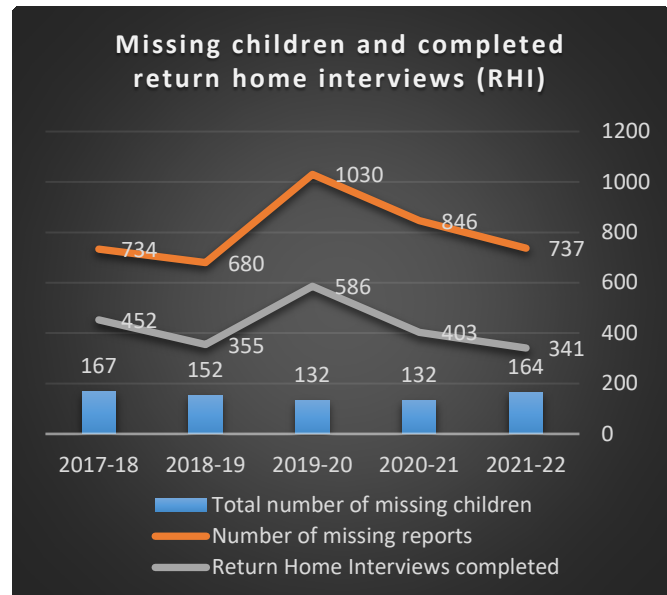


The majority of CCE risk assessments have been undertaken for males (81%), which represents the national picture. Over 2021-22, exploitation through gangs was the most prevalent model

amongst 10 - 16 year olds, followed by forced theft and forced labour. 100% of the young people discussed at MACE have a bespoke safety plan and this has been stable since 2014-15. In 2021-22, 57% of CCE risk assessments reviewed at 6 months showed evidence of reduced risk.

3.4 Missing Children

When a child goes missing or runs away they are at risk. Safeguarding children therefore includes protecting them from this risk. Children may run away from a problem or they may have been coerced to run away by someone else. Although looked after children are particularly vulnerable when they go missing, the majority of children who go missing are not looked after, and go missing from their family home. The CSCP seeks assurance on the approach of safeguarding partners, to protect children from the risks associated with going missing. In 2020/21, following a successful Return Home Interview (RHI), 66% of cases showed a reduction in missing/absent episodes. A small number were identified as being reported missing at the same time as being on the Children Missing Education list.



3.5 Staying engaged in education

There are 71,753 young people aged under 25 who live in the borough with many young people benefiting from the rich offer of education and work opportunities. Over 90% of Camden's schools have an Ofsted 'good' or 'outstanding' rating, with more young people aged 17 and 18 in education, employment and training (EET) than the London average. Our approach aims to reduce the rate of school exclusions, absences and missing episodes to decrease vulnerability to exploitation. Camden's Vulnerability Matrix uses vulnerability indicators to inform educational professionals that a child is at risk of not fulfilling their potential and experiencing negative life outcomes. Reduction in the number of school exclusions ensures that young people are able to access appropriate education support to enable achievements to be fulfilled.

3.6 Experiences of violence in adolescence

In 2022, Camden VAWG board was launched, following Camden Women's Forum's inquiry into Domestic Abuse to consider the strategic response to VAWG in Camden. From an operational perspective the VAWG board applies an intersectional and trauma informed approach, recognising that people of all genders are affected by gender-based abuse. A multi-agency approach to safeguard Victim/Survivors is embodied in a fortnightly Multi agency Risk assessment conference (MARAC) in partnership with MPS, probation, health and voluntary community sector services and other agencies. The in house Independent Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocate (IDSVA) service, Camden Safety Net, provides holistic support to Victim/Survivors of domestic and sexual violence aged 16 years and over; IDSVA's work closely with partner agencies and are embedded within co-locations, such as, hospital and substance misuse services. Camden Safety Net is also working closely with health colleagues to deliver a programme of training to GPs and other medical professionals. The Board also recognises the intersectional aspects that can contribute to risk, such as poverty, ethnicity, mental health or disability. For example, disabled people were more than twice as likely to have been victims of

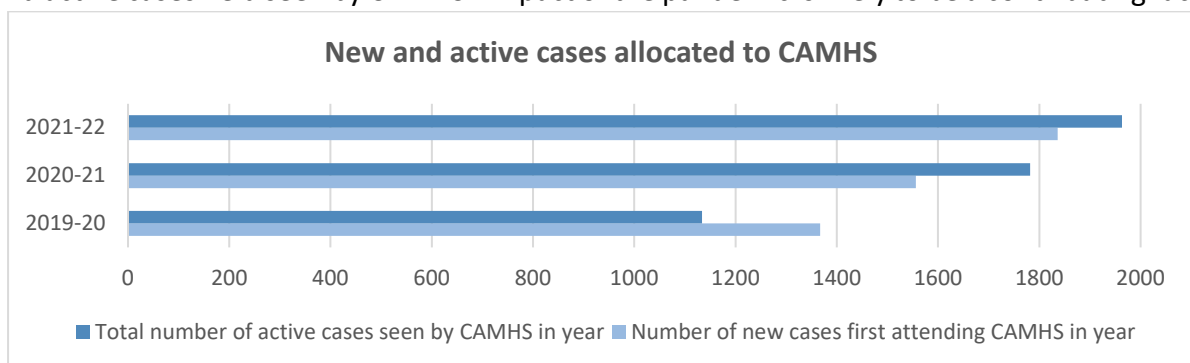
domestic abuse, stalking or rape than people without a disability (ONS 2020) and a plethora of negative health related outcomes for Victim/Survivors, including increased risk of depression and suicide.

3.7 Adolescents with additional needs and disabilities

Camden’s [Local Area SEND Strategy 2022-2027](#) and the CSCP’s multiagency guidance on [Safeguarding Children and Young People with Disabilities](#) considers how special educational needs, developmental or learning difficulty and/or a disability can impact how adolescents communicate and interact with their peer group, family and those they meet in their neighbourhoods and community. The Strategy Group recognises that it is important to not only explore how to prevent activity addressed the additional vulnerability to risks, but also consider alternatives to how we identify those that need intervention, and support through working closely with health, education, local authority and community partners. This includes thinking through the disproportionate impact of trauma for those with additional needs and the impact this has on the mental health and susceptibility to exploitation. This approach also extends to considering how disruption activity is managed by safeguarding agencies, and that appropriate intermediaries are identified in prosecution space, with special consideration given to adolescents with additional needs held in custody.

3.8 Child and Adolescent Mental Health

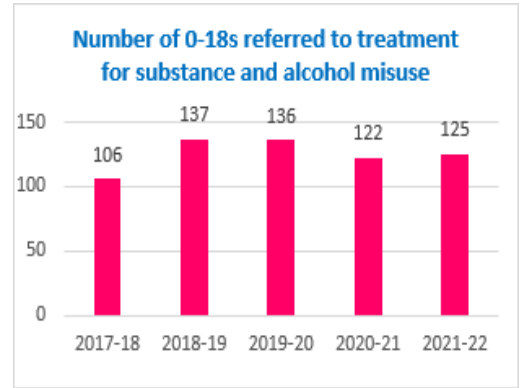
According to the World Health Organization (WHO), globally, one in seven 10-19-year-olds experiences a mental disorder, which includes depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders, which is among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents, with suicide as the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds. We know that adolescents with adolescents with mental health conditions are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, discrimination, stigma (affecting readiness to seek help), educational difficulties, risk-taking behaviours, physical ill-health and human rights violations. 2021-22 saw an increase in the total number of new cases to CAMHS, analysis over the last 5 years shows an increasing trend in new and active cases held seen by CAMHS. Impact of the pandemic is likely to be a contributing factor.



Talking and teaching about mental wellbeing is pivotal as we know that children and young people are increasingly experiencing challenges, and that adolescents are at particular risk of feeling lonely, and in need of finding the capability to take care of themselves and receive support if problems arise.

3.9 Substance misuse

In 2021-22, there were 125 referrals to the FWD young people's substance misuse service, compared to 122 in the previous year. 100% of children with an identified issue received an intervention. The most common reason for young people accessing the service relates to cannabis (61%) followed by alcohol (20%), nicotine (9%) and small percent (1%) for other substances. Impact of the service is evidenced in substance reduction following engagement with the service which is higher than national averages. The proportion of children who had been in care for at least 12 months and identified as having a substance misuse issue decreased in 2020-21 but remains higher than the national, inner London and statistical neighbour averages for 2019-20. CSCP has adapted its multi-agency substance misuse training to incorporate new trends in substance misuse.



3.10 Serious youth violence and knife crime

The pandemic had an effect on nearly all types of recorded crime, including knife crime. The level of youth knife crime victims in Camden has returned to pre-pandemic levels, but it still considerably lower than at its most recent peak in February 2018. Preventing and responding to knife crime and violence takes a multi-disciplinary approach. Services such as the Youth Justice Service, Children's Social Care, Adolescent Hubs at Health settings, Community Safety and the Reducing Youth Violence and Exploitation Service provide support and intervention to address violence. Camden also works in partnership with the MPS, Health, schools and voluntary sector to provide a multi-agency response that understands the complexities of youth violence. Camden also has bespoke programmes such as ENGAGE, where youth workers support children in Police study; and Evolve, which supports young people aged 18-25 who are affected by youth violence and exploitation.

3.11 Reducing criminalisation of children looked after

In line with national protocol to reduce unnecessary criminalisation of looked-after children and care leavers, Camden is committed to finding the right multi-agency approach across children's social care, justice, police and health, in order to collectively commit to helping vulnerable children and young people achieve their full potential. This is in recognition that many looked after children have experienced abuse and trauma, affecting their emotional and behavioural development, potentially making them particularly vulnerable to involvement in the criminal justice system, and that criminalisation can be a barrier to successful transition to adulthood and future life prospects. The CSCP seeks assurance, from the Corporate Parent that those working with looked-after children and care leavers, strive to understand the underlying causes of a young person's behaviour, whilst also striking a balance so that victims have a right to be protected from all types of offending. Part of this involves taking a preventative approach, by ensuring looked-after children have the right placements that meet their identified needs, and not placed at greater risk of exploitation. Other tailored approaches can be more restorative, or diversionary, to help avoid prosecution, and able to take place informally within the care placement.

3.12 Safeguarding unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)

From 2010 to 2020, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) accounted on average for 15.4% of the total number of first-time asylum applicants aged less than 18 years in the UK. These young people risk their lives and undergo traumatic journeys in search of a better life. However, when they arrive in the UK, they are vulnerable to significant ongoing traumatic experiences. The number of children and young people presenting in Camden as UASC has increased significantly during 2021/22, and these children now make up a third of our Looked After cohort. An UASC Pod/Reflective Group has been established with a focus on working with unaccompanied children and progressing their immigration status, health, education and wellbeing. The pods are co-located, allowing for collaborative work in this area which requires specialist knowledge and a sensitive therapeutic approach due to the specific trauma our unaccompanied children have experienced in their countries of origin or in their journeys into the UK. This includes developing our work around identity, and providing training to equip the workforce with knowledge, skills and tools when identifying and responding to UASC.

3.13 Gangs

A gang is group of people with a shared identity and involvement in criminal activity. Whilst each gang has its own profile and characteristics, every gang in Camden is involved in the illegal drugs trade. Children and young people are exploited both in gangs and by gangs, and are at an increased risk of violence. Gang-associated children and young people are recognised as being of high risk of exploitation. The gangs picture in Camden has changed over the past 2 years, with a diversification of criminality and a less-obvious focus on the shared identity element of gang membership for children and younger adults. It is predicted that this will shift again, as new groups cement and opposition relationships follow.

3.14 Modern slavery and the NRM Panel

The NRM is the national framework for identifying adult and child victims of human trafficking and modern slavery through referrals. Camden and Islington are serving as joint pilot site for devolved decision making through multi-agency panels to assess children at risk of human trafficking or modern slavery. First responders are those professionals who encounter potential child victims of trafficking/slavery and recognise indicators who are statutory responsible to make a referral to the NRM. There has been a noted increase of identification and referrals because of this pilot which has enabled children and young people at risk to be identified in a timely manner and safeguarded.

3.15 Camden profile of exploitation through radicalisation and extremism

Camden has been operating a Prevent strategy since 2009 and this work is overseen by the Community Safety Partnership. Since that time, we have seen a long-term shift and diversification in the nature of terrorism threat to London and UK national security to consist mainly of low-complexity attacks mounted by lone actors or small groups. We have also seen a shift from UK individuals travelling overseas to join proscribed terrorist organisations to those individuals returning or reaching back to radicalise people in the UK.

In Camden we have seen a rise in the number of individuals being referred to Prevent with ideological drivers that appear to be mixed, unclear or unstable. There is often no links to particular groups but narrative consistent with Daesh, Far Right and even American school

shooters has been seen. Antisemitism, Misogyny, Homo/Transphobia and Islamophobia are commonly articulated as concerns. We have also seen a rise in the number of individuals being referred with multiple and complex vulnerabilities including domestic violence, criminal history, autism, social isolation, learning disabilities and substance misuse.

Our radicalisation concerns have ranged from online grooming and sharing of harmful content, private tutors and self-radicalisation. Prevent referrals have been from a variety of sources and relating to different age groups. Our profile however has been largely in line with national data where, this year saw a 30% increase in referrals, attributed to the effect of the Pandemic 36% of referrals came from schools and .59% were under 20 years of age. (Home Office 2021/22). Providing support to people who may be at risk of radicalisation because of international events also continues to be a priority work area for Prevent.

4. Understanding the adolescent experience in Camden

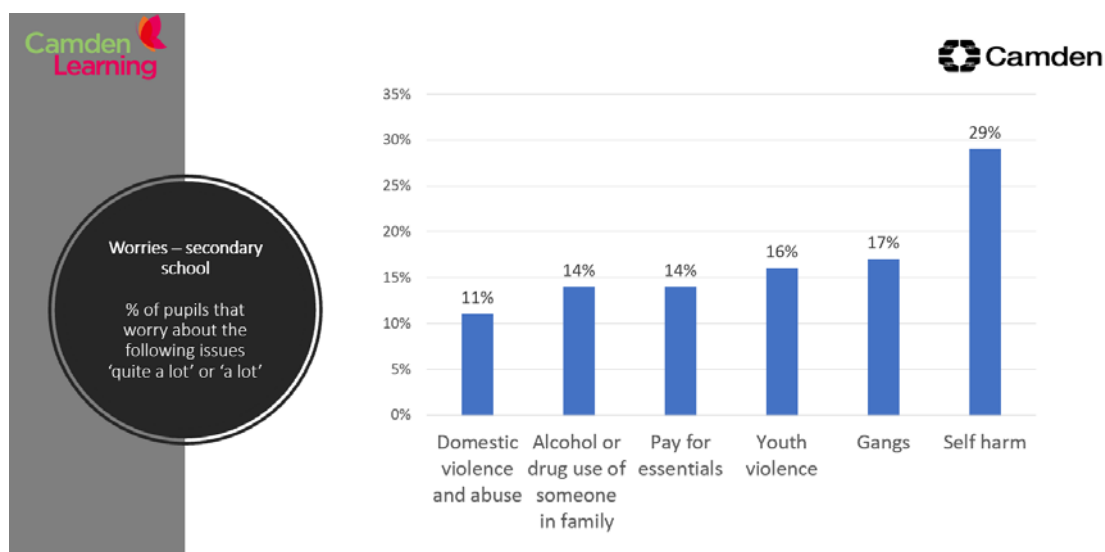
The CSCP is committed to build on this strong foundation of voice and engagement, by developing services which ensures that children and young people continue to have an active and meaningful voice. Participation programme enables children and young people to have their say, share their views and experiences, challenge and support local decision makers shape and influence strategic planning, commissioning and service provision at an individual, service and strategic level. Partners have established young people's participation programmes which influence and scrutinise service development.

The following are just a few examples of our forums that involve children and young people:

- *Young inspection 2021 – Camden young people's pathway*
- *Young Inspection 2020 - Report on support services during lockdown for Camden children, young people and care leavers*
- *Young Inspection 2019 – Support for emotional and mental health of young people aged 14-19*
- *Youth safety Taskforce consultation 2017*
- *Peer Advocate Programme*
- *Youth Safety Week*
- *Online Safety Week*
- *Exploitation awareness week*
- *Modern Slavery week*
- *CSCP's Young Advisors*
- *Annual youth shout-out event*
- *Annual schools Health Related Behaviour questionnaire*



Surveys and participation activities that inform our understanding of adolescent experiences in Camden. A number of activities focussed on eliciting staff and service user views on services and risks facing adolescents have taken place. Findings have revealed the perceptions of risk in Camden, as held by parents, children and staff (set out below) as well as recommendations on the help and support parents and children feel would be most effective. The chart below shows findings from Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) conducted with Camden schools in 2022.



Service user recommendations on how to address risk and provide support have been used to devise our adolescent safeguarding strategy and to develop our services. The voice of young people is firmly at the centre of the work and keeping them safe is the top priority. A health related behaviour questionnaire is usually conducted every 2 years. The 2021-22 questionnaire was completed by 1307 Camden school children and young people aged between 9-15. It told us that that lessons helped children to understand healthy relationships, consent and sexual harassment. 21% of year 8 students reported that war and terrorism make them worry 'quite a lot'.

Camden has developed many new and innovative programmes to explore new approaches in safeguarding adolescents. The programmes follow the principle that tackling the risks faced by vulnerable young people involved providing a diverse range of opportunities and support.

- Honest Grind Coffee, part of The Avalon Project, aims to provide specialist training programs that give vulnerable young people the skills and tool they need to find meaningful employment. Every young person in the Honest Grind Crew is paid the equivalent of the London Living Wage , and every penny goes back into supporting them on their journey
- The Engage service provides specialist youth support to children in Police custody
- The Regent’s Park Guardianship Project aims to explore how members of the community can come together to provide a safeguarding role for children and young people in their area
- The Choices Programme is a series of workshops for secondary schools delivered by Camden’s Detached Youth Work Team. The focus is raising awareness of knife crime and deterring young people from carrying and using weapons.

5. Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

It is recognised nationally, that the impact of the pandemic negatively affected young people’s mental health and well-being. Over 2021-22, there was an increase in the total number of new cases first attending CAMHS and the total number of active cases, which the pandemic is a likely contributing factor. To address this mental health need, the Out of Hours Service was quickly expanded and a 24/7 Crisis Line and Crisis Hub fast tracked to provide immediate mental health support to young people.

*Looking back...lockdown negatively impacted my behaviour, which in turn impacted my family. I know they were stressed and constantly trying to help me see things differently. **CSCP Young Advisor***

The largest form of child sexual exploitation is online grooming (28%) which has increased due to a possible impact from COVID-19, and the fact that children are spending more time online. The risk of radicalisation online has also been heightened during the pandemic due to the increased time children spend online unsupervised. This includes video sharing platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, which can be creative outlets for many young people. However, it can be easy for children and young people to come across inappropriate content while using the apps. Because algorithms are used to show users new content, it’s easy for young people to come across inappropriate or upsetting videos. The platform also has communication features that allow users to privately message each other which could put your child at risk of being contacted by someone they don’t know. Therefore, primarily through our work with schools, we continue to promote online safety and work with our partners to ensure awareness and risks are considered in all settings working with children including schools.

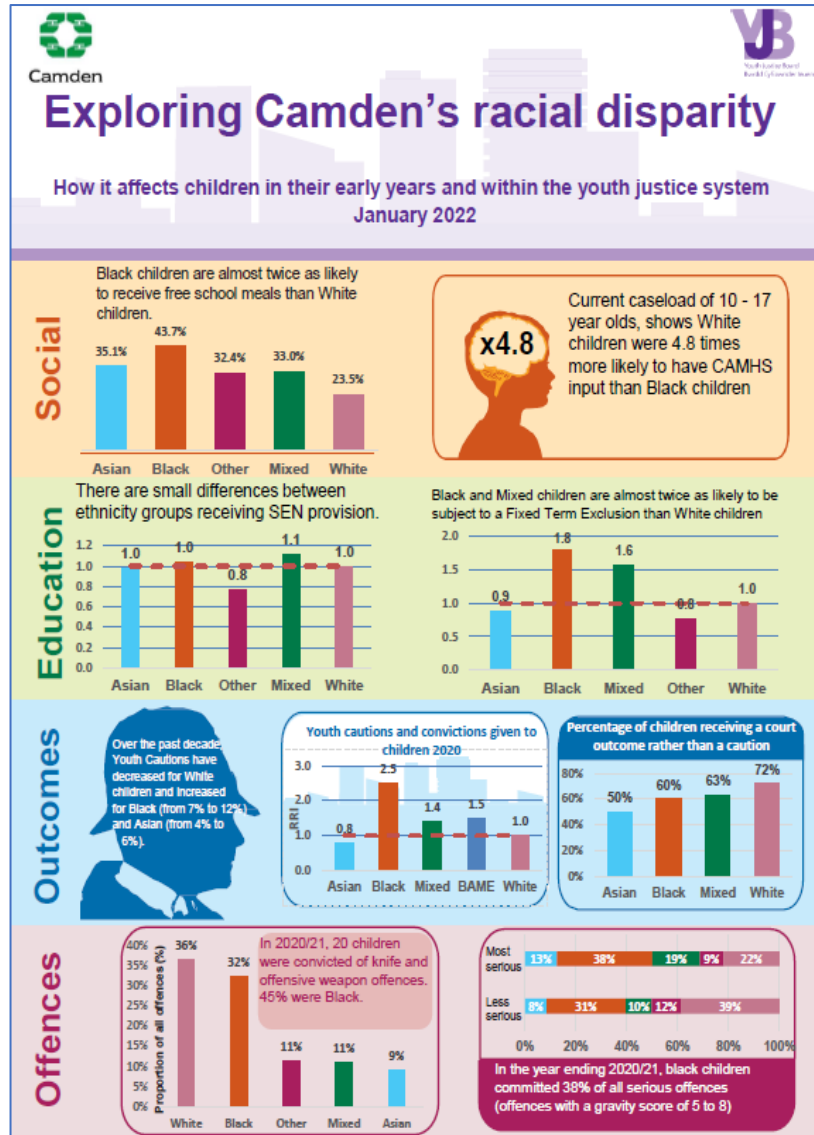
Camden acknowledged the important role schools play in protecting young people and ensuring they are visible. Regular attendance reports were collected and assurance provided that all schools re-opened fully in March 2021.

6. Establishing inclusive, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory safeguarding practice

The HMIP thematic report on the experience of black and mixed heritage boys in the youth justice system (2021) highlighted the disproportion of black and mixed heritage males involved in the criminal justice system. This was followed by HMIP Academic Insights report titled Adulthood bias within child protection and safeguarding (2022), which raises how racialised discrimination can result in children’s rights being diminished, with notions of innocence and vulnerability displaced by notions of responsibility and culpability.

It calls for multi-agency concept of intersectionality to encourage professionals to be curious and explore how the intersections of race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, gender, dis/abilities, and wider lived experiences may have impacted upon the lives of individual children. Reflecting on the learning from City & Hackney LCSRP Child Q, the Partnership will consider any potential adultification of black and ethnic minority cohort. Assurance needs to be sought that there are not barriers to children being reported missing, information captured/shared during arrest and in custody.

The Youth Justice Service have championed exploring racial disparity within the youth justice system and have reported to the CSCP on outcomes. Over 2023-25, the CSCP will explore wider training to enable professionals to understand processes around age assessments as well as ensuring we have a continued partnership response to our wider cohort of children at risk of exploitation.



7. Vulnerable Adolescents Risk and Exploitation Action Plan

The live action plan is used to sets out Camden’s partnership approach to working with adolescents at risk because of cross-cutting vulnerabilities that make them more susceptible to

multiple forms of exploitation. Prevent, identify, support, disrupt and enforce/prosecute make up the framework, which underpins the multi-agency strategic action plan:

Prevent

- ☑ Awareness raising campaigns on aspects of adolescent risk aimed at parents, children, staff and local businesses and services.
- ☑ Training staff and partners on how to identify and respond to adolescent risk.
- ☑ Equipping children with life skills such as conflict resolution, anger management, staying safe and being resilient through provision of talks, workshops, dramas and PSHE and online safety teaching.
- ☑ Providing access to early help and early intervention services to intervene early to divert children from exploitation and harm.
- ☑ Use of Vulnerable adolescent strategy group to develop and refine multiagency strategic response.

Identify

- ☑ Maintaining a comprehensive dataset of all aspects of adolescent safeguarding and ensuring regular monitoring, review and analysis of trends and patterns.
- ☑ Use of issue specific risk assessment tools to assist in determination of level of risk.
- ☑ Supporting parents, communities and professionals to identify signs of vulnerability and know what they should do and where to get help.
- ☑ Ensure professionals working at all levels of need have access to expert advice and consultation.
- ☑ Continue to monitor outcomes and learn from successes and failures through MACE.
- ☑ Regular use of service user participation activities to enhance understanding of community perspective on risks and efficacy of services provided.
- ☑ Use of strategic and operational partnerships to ensure information-sharing.

Support

- ☑ Close multiagency case work with agencies and services to ensure holistic support.
- ☑ Production and dissemination of policy, procedure, multiagency guidance and joint working protocols to ensure effective partnership working.
- ☑ Use of systemic, integrated adolescent approach to working with parents and children to ensure full engagement in planning and decision-making.
- ☑ Provision of Family Group Conference and mediation services to rebuild parent-child relationship and put child and family in control of planning
- ☑ Provision of specialist therapeutic support and intervention through CAMHs, the FWD drug service, specialist external organisations.
- ☑ A network of support professionals linked to hot-spots to take a proactive approach to identification, risk assessment and evidence gathering.
- ☑ An offer of continued support - monitoring the progress of young people who have successfully exited exploitative relationships- by ensuring that there is accessible, consistent, and long-term support for victims throughout the investigation, prosecution and post-court.

Disrupt

- ☑ Use of case related meetings including CSE strategy meetings, CCE response meetings and Bronze panel etc. to gather intelligence on exploiters.
- ☑ Use of monthly MACE meeting to identify adolescent safeguarding themes and trends to share intelligence, develop partnership solutions and identify perpetrators.

Prosecution

- Develop a strategic overview of the progress of investigations.
- Use of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) as a statutory defence for victims of criminal exploitation.
- Use of Achilles heel and Abduction notices to prosecute offenders.