

MEDWAY Contextual Safeguarding Strategy: 2021-2023

**Medway Safeguarding
Children Partnership**

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1. Foreword

This strategy represents a partnership approach to improving the multiagency response to contextual safeguarding and exploitation in Medway. It places a requirement on all agencies to be ambitious for swift improvements; show tenacity in their realisation of this ambition; and to prioritise the voice of victims, children, and their families.

It represents the start of a way forward for Medway. Whilst we have begun our journey, we must continue to learn from others that are ahead of us. We must be open, transparent, and honest to encourage improvement and innovation.

It seeks to unite all the different agencies and organisations that touch the lives of children and young people in Medway in a determined and focussed effort to **prevent** child exploitation wherever possible, to **protect** children and young people who are at risk or are being exploited, to **pursue** the perpetrators of exploitation and to **provide support** for victims, survivors, and their families.

The success of the commitments set out in this document will be determined by improved outcomes: whilst specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely actions are really important, the value of any action will only be evident if it promotes better outcomes for children and young people at risk of or victims of child exploitation.

2. Context

A Partnership Approach

As part of the Medway Safeguarding Children's Partnership, relevant partners come together to ensure that children are safeguarded across Medway. Medway Council, Kent Police and Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) are the three safeguarding partners that make up the MSCP. Other agencies including Education, Health Providers, CAFCASS, The Probation Service, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, Medway Youth Offending Team and Secure Estates, the voluntary sector, community and faith groups, housing providers, and sports groups are included as relevant agencies.

There are 110 schools and education providers in Medway, as well as thousands of voluntary sector organisations. Medway Voluntary Action (MVA) supports not-for-profit organisations, groups, and community members to develop skills and build resources.

We are all committed to this strategy and the part we play to ensure children and young people within Medway are safeguarded.

Governance and Accountability

The Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership (MSCP) has the responsibility to monitor, scrutinise and challenge all services individually and collectively on their performance in responding to child exploitation and the contexts in which it occurs. The MSCP will provide strategic oversight of the strategy through the Kent and Medway Joint Exploitation Group (JEG). The JEG will provide the strategic links with the Community Safety Partnership and the Adult Safeguarding Board. The Kent and Medway JEG will provide an update report to the MSCP Executive every six months.

The coordination and delivery of the strategy will be done through the Medway Contextual Safeguarding Meeting.

The MSCP will also regularly quality assure the effectiveness of partners responses to child exploitation. The Independent Scrutineer has a crucial role here in assuring the partnership that progress is being made in delivering this strategy. The MSCP will include child exploitation themed audits as part of its multi agency audit programme. It will be an expectation that any judgement about the quality and effectiveness of exploitation services will take account of the extent

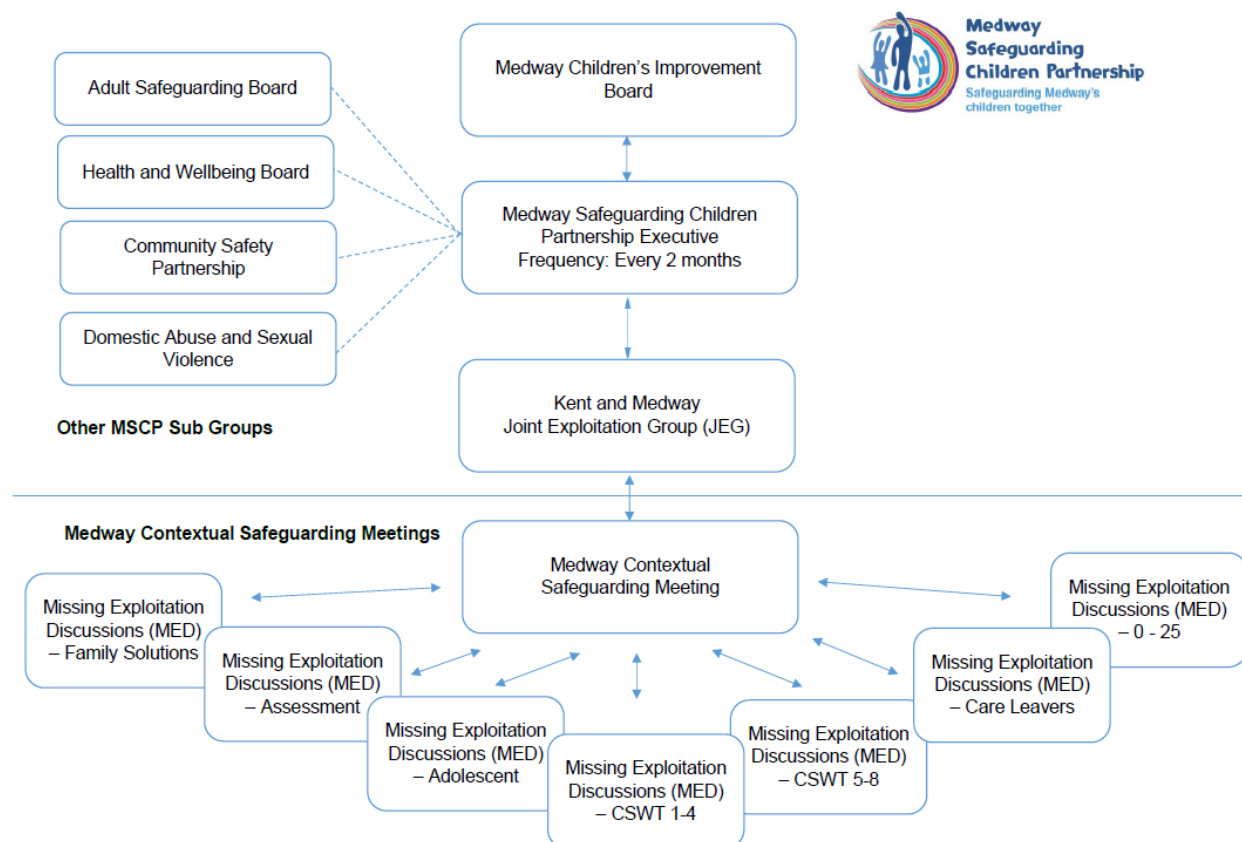
to which the participation and engagement of children, young people and their families can be evidenced.

In addition, whilst it exists, the Improvement Board will receive and scrutinise regular update reports to ensure that the recommendations from the Ofsted report are being delivered. One of Ofsted's recommendations for improvement related to the need to strengthen the response to contextual safeguarding therefore the Board will receive reports on a regular basis.

Other key statutory bodies including the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Community Safety Partnership should receive, scrutinise and challenge regular reports about prevalence, trends and practice on exploitation.

The Council has an Overview and Scrutiny Committee whose role is to provide effective scrutiny and challenge to ensure the Council's statutory duties to children and families are being fulfilled. This committee will also want to assure itself that the response to children being exploited in Medway is comprehensive and effective.

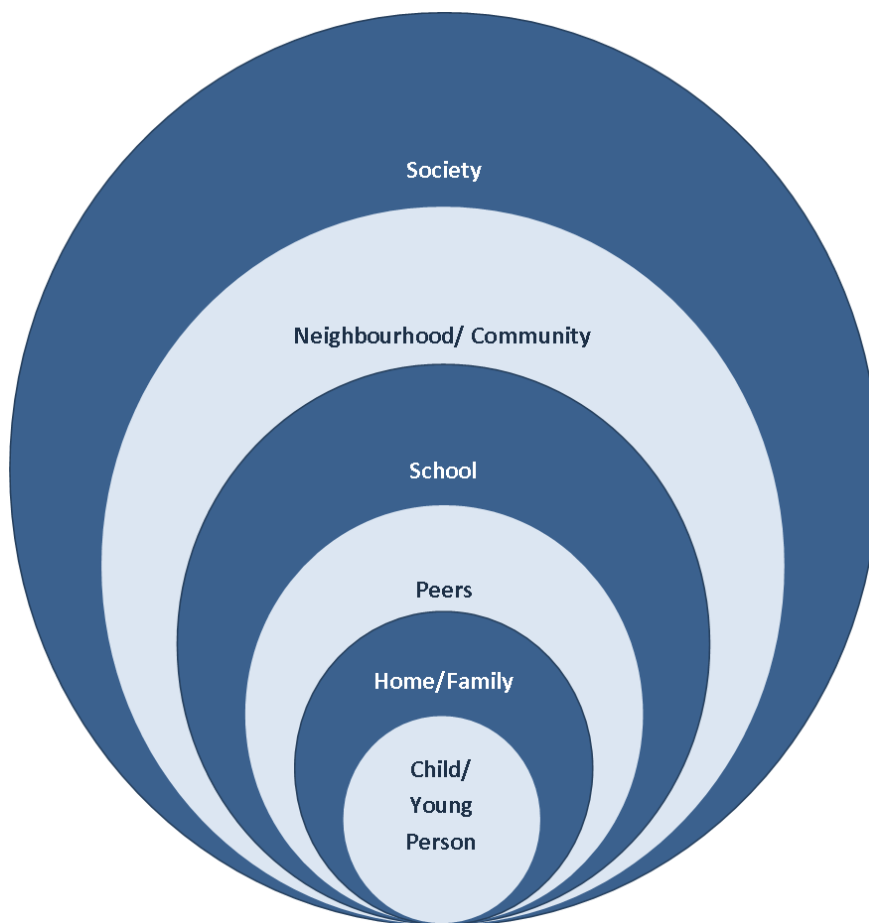
The following diagram outlines the governance model.



3. Introduction

What is Contextual Safeguarding?

'Contextual safeguarding' was developed by Dr Carlene Firmin at the University of Bedfordshire. Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of different social contexts and from a range of external threats.



Contextual Safeguarding is relevant to a range of risks that includes:

- Child Sexual Exploitation – including peer-on-peer exploitation
- Child Criminal Exploitation – including County Lines
- Risks associated with gangs
- Modern Slavery and Trafficking
- Missing young people
- Radicalisation (PREVENT)
- Harmful Sexual Behaviour

As our understanding of these risks has developed, we have come to understand that sometimes the different contexts are inter-related which means that some of our most vulnerable children and young people may encounter multiple risks at any one time. Vulnerability can take a wide range of different forms, including physical and mental health difficulties, early exposure to domestic abuse and parental substance misuse as well as other forms of abuse and neglect, and being a child in care of the local authority. Some young people who have autistic spectrum disorder who find it difficult to relate to peers or who find it hard to come in mainstream school can become particularly vulnerable.

Whatever form it takes and whatever the background of the victim, we know that the effects of exploitation are devastating and long-lasting for the children concerned and their families.

In the main what they have in common is that somewhere in the background there are adults who use, abuse and exploit young people for their own gain and gratification, be it financial, sexual or psychological. These adults are both cynical and manipulative and, especially in the case of organised crime, are very effective in achieving their aims. They are quick to adapt their 'business model' to fit changing circumstances as the recent Covid pandemic has illustrated.

Child exploitation takes many forms and is often interconnected; that children who are being criminally exploited may also be being sexually exploited. It is however generally acknowledged that it is boys who are predominantly targeted for criminal exploitation and girls are more often targeted for sexual exploitation. It is however important not to make assumptions in this regard as we know that both boys and girls can be victims of both.

We must also recognise that while no ethnic group is safe from the risk of child exploitation, those groups who are disadvantaged because of poverty, inequality prejudice and discrimination are often most vulnerable.

Any action that is taken to tackle child exploitation locally must ensure that children from minority ethnic backgrounds are encouraged and empowered by

the statutory and voluntary sectors, and their communities, to speak out about their own experiences of abuse so they can be afforded the same right to protection and justice as others. We must continue to ask why it can sometimes seem even more difficult for these children to come forward and how we can overcome their fear and lack of trust in professionals to provide what is needed to protect them.

More broadly it is now understood that exploitation of young people gestates where communities feel uncared for in terms of the physical environment in which they live. Part of working with the contexts that pose a risk to children and young people must be about challenging these experiences and creating new positive narratives that enable young people to thrive in their communities. In practice this could be about agencies working together within the community in a manner that seeks to challenge and change issues that the community experience.

Finally, children are ideally best protected by their parents, carers and their families. Their identity, resilience and their sense of self-worth comes from their families. Parents and families must be empowered and enabled to offer the best care and protection they can to their children. Where agencies have corporate parenting responsibilities, the responsibility in this regard is even greater.

Definitions of Exploitation

In developing a strategy to respond effectively to children at risk of harm from outside their homes it is important that there is clarity about the nature of the harm the children to which children are being exposed. In this context we mostly refer to different types of 'exploitation'. Child exploitation is the act of using a minor for profit, labour, sexual gratification or some other form of personal or financial gain.

A common feature of child exploitation is that the child or young person does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not necessarily see themselves as a victim of exploitation. There has to be an acknowledgement that for some young people they may get rewards from those exploiting them that go beyond the financial or material. They may get a sense of belonging, self-worth, and value in the short term that has been denied to them in other aspects of their lives. We have to be clear however that no child can consent to their own exploitation and abuse.

Child Criminal Exploitation

occurs when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence (to

the child or their family). The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can occur through the use of technology. (Serious Violence Strategy 2018, Home Office)

Children and young people may also be trafficked for the purposes of criminal exploitation where they are moved away from their locality, to other locations. This is often a feature of 'County Lines'.

The Medway definition of a gang and young street groups is set out in the Kent and Medway gangs strategy; 'Gangs A relatively durable, predominantly street-based group of young people who: (1) See themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group, and (2) Engage in a range of serious criminal activity and violence They may also have any or all of the following factors: (3) Identify with or lay claim over territory (4) Have some form of identifying structural feature (5) Are in conflict with other, similar, Gangs.

Child Sexual Exploitation

can be perpetrated by an individual or by a group within the context of a family or community environment. The latter involves people who come together in person or online for the purpose of setting up, co-coordinating and/or taking part in the sexual exploitation of children in either an organised or opportunistic way.

CSE in reality can refer to:

- Inappropriate, sexually exploitative relationships where the young person believes the abuser to be their boyfriend or girlfriend, perceiving him/herself to be in a romantic relationship with this individual.
- Groups of adults abusing children and young people, often through a particular adult seen as a "boyfriend" by the victim of the abuse (the "party house" model).
- Abuse of children via the internet, which can include online grooming of children, particularly through social networking applications; and is usually "non-contact" abuse (for example, through encouraging the child to share sexually explicit images or streaming of sexual abuse). It can occasionally develop from online abuse into face-to-face meetings, which can lead to contact abuse.
- Peer-on-peer exploitation, particularly by gangs and other peer groups, including sexual abuse as part of group's rituals of "initiation" or "punishment".

Trafficking

Where children and young people are moved away from their locality, home town or from abroad to other locations, for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

Exploitation Toolkit

The aims of the tools are to improve how Kent and Medway disrupt exploitation and to help agencies work together to create safety and reduce harm. The identification tool is designed to support professional judgement for those professionals who do not normally complete social care assessments. The second tool, assessment and planning is an extension of the identification tool, as well as identifying if a child or young person is being exploited. It helps professionals to draw out the analysis, identify the most appropriate intervention(s) and formulate a plan which reduces harm in the contexts it is occurring.

The Kent and Medway Child Exploitation tools and guidance can be accessed [here](#).

There are also training/workshops available about the tools [here](#).

Exploitation Champions

The MSCP has a multi agency network of exploitation champions who support the development of a safe, responsive and effective service for children and young people who experience or are at risk of exploitation within their agency, and make links with multi agency partners.

The exploitation champions support the implementation of this strategy, enhance professionals and public awareness of child exploitation in Medway; implement good practice on the issue of exploitation in Medway agencies and support the professional development of others in relation to exploitation. Further information about the Exploitation Champions can be found [here](#).

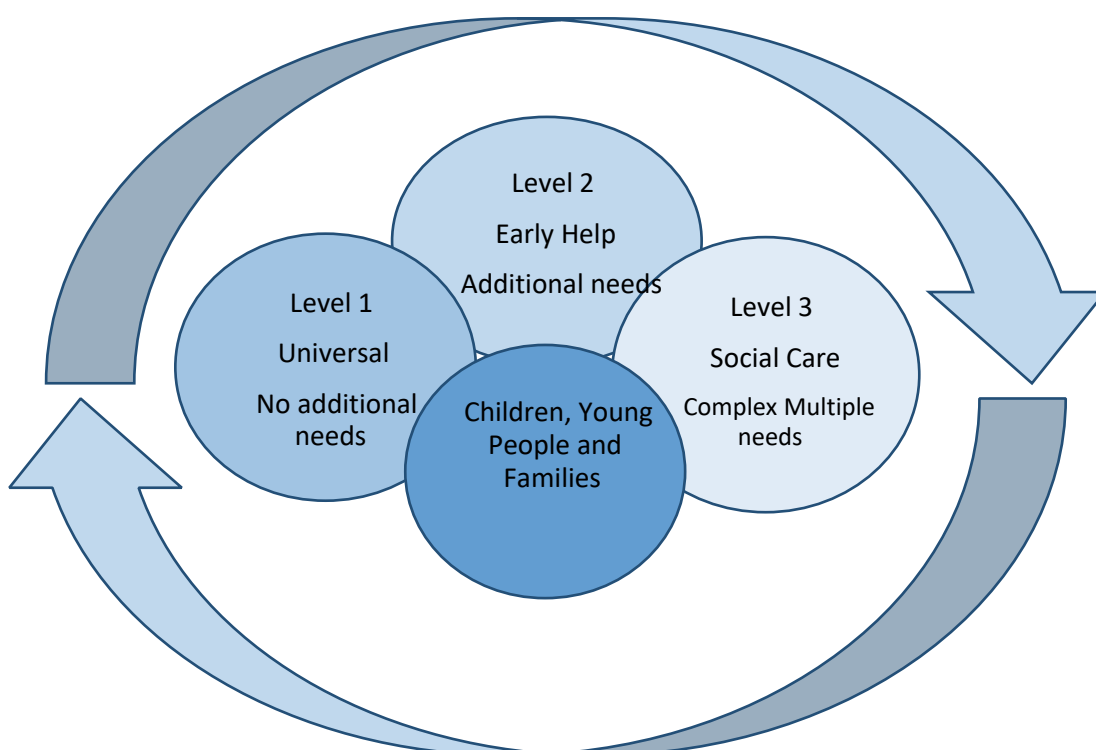
4. Continuum of Need

Levels of Intervention

Children's needs vary at different times and in different circumstances and Intervention needs to be based on a clear and consistent understanding of need. This requires all practitioners, across the partnership including those providing services to adults with children, to understand their role in identifying emerging problems and to share information with other practitioners to support early identification and assessment. In Medway we have therefore constructed a continuum of need to identify the right support at the right time. The diagram below summarises this. We recognise that at different times families' needs may change and so they may move between levels. The continuum of need is therefore not a linear approach but a cycle, illustrating how needs and support can change.

Continuum of Need

The level of support can change in line with the level of need.



The Medway Threshold Guidance 'A multi-agency guide to assess levels of need and identifying the most appropriate support in Medway' and introductory threshold video can be accessed [here](#).

Professionals who have concerns regarding young people are advised to use Medway's threshold guidance to support them to assess the right level of need.

All contacts and referrals for statutory intervention, safeguarding concerns and Early Help must be made through First Response into the Single Point of Access via the online portal.

The form should be used to make a written referral for all concerns that fall within the partnership threshold document as: • Level 3 Statutory Intervention, safeguarding concerns • Level 2 Early Help response on all single or multi-agency coordination needs. (Please tick the EH box on the contact and referral form to indicate this is an Early Help Request)

Using this form will help make sure the response to contact and referrals are effective as possible. **Immediate safeguarding concerns should always be made by telephone to 01634 334466**

<https://www.medwayscp.org.uk/mscb/info/5/mscb-1/34/worried-child>

Exploitation Information Sharing Form

The Kent and Medway Exploitation Information Sharing Form (eINTEL) has been created so that multi-agency staff can share any information about Exploitation that may be important and relevant in order to build intelligence about Exploitation and better target the response to prevent and disrupt it.

Information shared in this way is received by Kent Police and this does not replace a contact and referral for statutory intervention, safeguarding concerns and Early Help as described above.

To share exploitation intelligence, click [here](#).

Contextual Safeguarding and Child Protection

Child Protection procedures under Working Together 2018 will be followed for the assessment of all cases of potential exploitation of children, whether it is possible criminal, sexual or contextual safeguarding (places and spaces) which can include harmful sexual behaviours by adolescents upon others. Where it is believed that a child/young person is experiencing or is likely to experience significant harm then a multi-agency strategy discussion will be convened.

If you have a concern about a child that is not already open to children's social care, you should seek safeguarding supervision or have a conversation with your

supervisor or designated safeguarding lead to agree what else needs to happen. This may include a referral for statutory intervention, safeguarding concerns or Early Help made through First Response into the Single Point of Access via the portal. If the child is already an open case to children's social care and the risks of harm are not immediate and significant then the case will be considered at a fortnightly service level Missing Exploitation Discussion chaired by the Group Manager of that service. Relevant partners involved with each individual child/young person discussed will be invited to attend to ensure full information is shared to enable robust safety planning to be considered and next steps to be made. If this meeting identifies that there are risks relating to Groups, Places or Spaces then these concerns are escalated to and considered at Medway's multi-agency Contextual Safeguarding meeting. This meeting is held monthly and is chaired by the Group Manager of the Adolescent Team and attended by representatives from the Kent Police, Health, Medway Task Force, YOS, Targeted Youth Support, Family Solutions, Housing and any other relevant professionals. During the meeting, minutes will be recorded, data collected, mapping undertaken, actions made and driven forward by relevant agencies.

Intelligence, themes and trends gained at Medway's Contextual Safeguarding Meeting will be presented via a report to the MSCP Kent and Medway Joint Exploitation Group. The JEG will provide the strategic links with the Community Safety Partnership and the Adult Safeguarding Board.

5. Our Commitment

All partner agencies in Medway are committed to rapid, sustained improvement and the achievement of outstanding services for our most vulnerable. Only by working together with shared aims and objectives can local partners achieve improved outcomes for children, young people and their families.

This document marks the start of a determined and consistent approach in Medway and represents a renewed multiagency partnership response to child exploitation and the contexts in which this takes place. The Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership is committed to relentlessly pursue improvements in front line services and do all it can to prevent child exploitation and protect and support the victims of this abuse.

Legislation such as the Children Act (1989 & 2004), Working Together (2018), as well as the recent reports such as the National Safeguarding Practice Review 2020 and Bedfordshire University's Contextual Safeguarding update (May 2020) all give us the guidance on how to proceed.

Our commitment is that Medway will build on current and best practice to:

- **Prevent** children and young people from becoming exploited through effective leadership, governance and a wider culture embedded within organisations and communities that recognises the root causes of exploitation, the signs and risk indicators and do all they can to tackle them.
- **Protect** children and young people who are at risk of exploitation as well as those who are already victims and survivors.
- **Pursue**, relentlessly, perpetrators of child exploitation, leading to prosecutions of those responsible, and ensure there is effective risk management of perpetrators in the community.
- **Provide support** for survivors of exploitation, ensuring their needs are met in the short, medium and long term.
- Ensure the **participation** of all children and young people at risk of or experiencing exploitation, as well as their families and communities, to ensure that their voices as well as the voices of survivors are heard and responded to.

The achievement of these outcomes will be tracked by use of a smart, multi-agency delivery plan.

This document sets out our strategy and our commitment. It is one of a suite of documents that support and safeguard children in Medway.

“Together we are stronger”

6. Vision

The MSCP is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children in Medway. We want Medway to be a place where children are safe from harm in their homes, families and communities and we want to ensure the right service is delivered the first time.

The MSCP will support and enable local organisations and agencies to work together in a system where:

- Children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted
- Partner organisations and agencies collaborate, share and co-own the vision for how to achieve improved outcomes for vulnerable children
- Organisations and agencies challenge appropriately and hold one another to account effectively
- There is early identification and analysis of new safeguarding issues and emerging threats
- Learning is promoted and embedded in a way that local services for children and families can become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- Information is shared effectively to facilitate more accurate and timely decision making for children and families.

7. Strategic Priorities

The MSCP has agreed the following strategic priorities for action for 2021-23:

- To further develop partnership working and information sharing, ensuring that all key strategies are aligned.
- To deliver multi-agency group work to families, maximising the expertise of professionals across the range of agencies in the partnership.
- To ensure that the delivery of services are underpinned by research, evidence based practice and a rolling programme of training across the partnership. Training will be aligned with other strategies such as the Early Help Strategy, the Neglect Strategy and the Parenting Strategy.... to ensure improved awareness, early recognition of concerns and a shared language.
- To promote innovation and encourage new and creative ways of working.
- To ensure that partner agencies share information so that children at risk, locations and themes are quickly identified and effective action taken.

8. Measuring Success

How will we know we have been successful?

Professionals, parents and individuals have the knowledge to identify signs of exploitation and confidence to report concerns and know where to go to report them.

Young people report that they feel safer in their communities.

Professionals say that they can access multi-agency support swiftly and that the support helps to reduce risks of harm to young people or to others in the community.

By strong collaborative working the partnership will have an accurate intelligence picture which informs the understanding of context and locations of concern.

Evidence of the impact of the strategy is demonstrated in the outcomes and contributions of each agency

MSCP Executive is proactive in oversight, challenge and support of the strategy and its implementation within partner agencies ensuring Medway wide engagement

9. Key Contact Information and Resources

Medway First Response Service

Online Portal

(For all contacts and referrals for children's statutory intervention, safeguarding concerns and early help)

If the child is in immediate danger

- Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm phone 01634 334 466
- Out of hours phone 03000 419 191

In an emergency phone 999

Kent and Medway Prevent

- Prevent Referral Form
- Prevent Referrals (Kent and Medway) email:
preventreferrals@kent.police.uk

Kent & Medway Violence Reduction Unit

Central email: VRU.Programme.Delivery@kent.police.uk

Kent and Medway Adult Safeguarding Board

Medway Safeguarding Children Partnership

Medway Community Safety Partnership

Medway Health and Wellbeing Board

Medway Exploitation Champions

Contextual safeguarding network

NELFT Medway young people's well being service

(For emotional wellbeing and mental health advice and support for young people and their families across Medway)

National Referral Mechanism

(For potential victims of modern slavery)

Prevent Duty Delivery Board (PDDB)