

# Tower Hamlets strategy to reduce violence, vulnerability and exploitation affecting children and young people (2021–24)

## Foreword and vision

Our shared vision is that every child and young person in Tower Hamlets is kept safe from violence and exploitation and supported to achieve their aspirations

In the Tower Hamlets Children and Families Strategy for 2019 to 2024, we set out our ambition to ensure that every child and young person in Tower Hamlets is healthy, safe and successful.

Every young person should be able to benefit from all that our borough has to offer: great educational opportunities, our beautiful open spaces, hobbies, creativity and sports, and the friendships and fun that are a part of growing up. The vast majority of children and young people live, play and study safely in Tower Hamlets. However, there is distressing and powerful evidence that some children and young people are facing unacceptable levels of risk in their lives. Serious violence and exploitation have devastating consequences for young people most directly affected, and for their families and friends. More generally, the fear of violence causes anxiety to many of our young people, and can prevent them from enjoying their childhoods.

Protection of young people is a priority for the Tower Hamlets partnership. In 2018, at the Mayor's Violent Crime Summit, the council, police, fire brigade and health partners committed themselves to a public health approach to violent crime. A range of strategic initiatives have been implemented over the past few years to better support and protect young people. Much progress has been made but there is a need to address these issues holistically through an overarching strategy with our positive ambition for children and young people at its heart.



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Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets

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## Introduction

This Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy is our borough's proactive, partnership-based approach to tackling criminal and sexual exploitation and serious violence affecting children and young people.

The strategy focuses on preventing violence through a whole-systems approach where different partners work alongside young people, families and the community to deliver evidence-based interventions to keep young people safe, to reduce risk and strengthen the protective factors in their lives. Implementation of the strategy will build on recent progress across the borough including a multi-agency Exploitation team and the development of a shared Violence Reduction Plan. Our strategic approach includes a greater focus on prevention and early intervention, developing a contextualised local safeguarding approach which focuses on the public environments where abuse occurs, and exploration of what more can be done to tackle violence and exploitation affecting young adults aged 18 to 24 as well as safeguarding those under 18.

Much progress has been made in Tower Hamlets in recent years, including through the Ending Groups, Gangs and Serious Youth Violence Strategy (2015 – 2018) but there is a need to tackle violence and exploitation holistically, with consistent, evidence-based interventions which avoid fragmented, crisis-driven responses. The governance arrangements reflect the importance of a joined up approach between community safety and child safeguarding agencies. The Vulnerable Young People and Exploitation sub-group of the Tower Hamlets Child Safeguarding Partnership will oversee implementation and the development of an operational plan. The Community Safety Partnership will have strategic oversight of the strategy, provide challenge through annual review discussions, and ensure this strategy is supported by wider violence reduction approaches across Tower Hamlets.

The strategy sets out the core principles and priorities which will guide our work. It will be followed with a detailed operational plan. This will be developed in partnership with young people, families and community organisations, and will ensure that there is clarity across the partnership about the support required and provided for young people and their families according to need and the level of risk they face. It will reflect emerging learning about the impact of the Coronavirus emergency on the borough's children and young people who have experienced bereavement and loss, family economic and social stress, and time away from education and their normal sources of support.

## How we developed this strategy

The strategy builds on engagement with stakeholders across the borough since the Mayor's Violent Crime Summit since 2018. It draws on analysis and reviews including a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment<sup>1</sup>, a Locality review conducted by the

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, S. et al (2019) Taking a public health approach to violence in Tower Hamlets: a needs assessment, | The Lancet; vol. 394, Special Issue, S99, , 2019 DOI:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)32896-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)32896-X)

Violence and Vulnerability Unit, and a consultation and engagement process which included:

An online public consultation which ran for four weeks between August and September 2020

Engagement with young people: members of the Tower Hamlets youth council and young mayor's team, the children in care council, young people supported by the multi-agency exploitation team, and young people who are members of the Barts Youth Empowerment Squad all contributed their views in different ways

Discussions and feedback with members of the Community Safety Partnership, Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership Vulnerable Young People and Exploitation Subgroup. Members of the Children and Families Partnership Board, and other stakeholders in the borough were also invited to provide feedback on the draft strategy.

The views and experiences of children and young people will remain at the heart of the borough's strategic approach to addressing violence, vulnerability and exploitation, and will be reflected in the operational plan and in communications for young people, families and communities.

## **Demographics, need and context**

Tower Hamlets is one of the youngest and fastest-growing populations of any local authority in England. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of 10 to 24 year-olds is expected to rise from 61,467 to 63,7932. The borough's young population is diverse and aspirational: 163 languages are spoken in our schools<sup>3</sup> and 47% aspire to a professional career<sup>4</sup>.

Yet, many young people in the borough grow up facing adversity. High child poverty and population density are independently associated with adverse childhood experiences<sup>5</sup>. In turn, adverse experiences in childhood are associated with negative effects over the life course, including a greater risk of violence victimisation.<sup>6</sup> London neighbourhoods that have suffered high levels of violence are also likely to have higher levels of deprivation<sup>7</sup>. In Tower Hamlets, the second most densely populated local authority in the country, 27.3% of children live in low income families<sup>8</sup>, and many families live in poor quality, overcrowded housing. Recent analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that "more than any demographic characteristics, area level deprivation was a key risk factor for violence

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<sup>2</sup> GLA 2018-based housing-led population projections.

<sup>3</sup> Tower Hamlets, 2020 Borough Profile (forthcoming)

<sup>4</sup> Tower Hamlets, 2017 Pupil Attitude Survey

<sup>5</sup> Dan Lewer, Emma King, Glen Bramley, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Morag C Treanor, Nick Maguire, Miriam Bullock, Andrew Hayward, Al Story, The ACE Index: mapping childhood adversity in England, *Journal of Public Health*, , fdz158, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdz158>

<sup>6</sup> Tower Hamlets Joint Strategic Needs Assessment spotlight on Family and Contextual Violence September 2019

<sup>7</sup> Wieshman et al, Violence in London: what we know and how to respond. A report commissioned by the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit, Behavioural Insights Team, February 2020

<sup>8</sup> Tower Hamlets Borough Profile, 2020. Figures are for children living in households in relative low income before housing costs, from Children in low income families, 2018/19, Department for Work and Pensions

victimisation”<sup>9</sup>, pointing to the importance of a localised, area-based focus in tackling violence.

Education is a positive story and an important protective factor for young people in Tower Hamlets: at age 16, the educational attainment of young people is higher than the national average<sup>10</sup>. However, not all students thrive in education, with some groups less likely to leave school with good GCSE’s. Although permanent exclusions are rare in Tower Hamlets, fixed term exclusions rose by 39% between 2014/15 and 2017/18. Managed moves between schools and alternative provision referrals have also risen by 17% since 2014. 11 As the Timpson Review of exclusions noted, all too often “fixed period and permanent exclusion can, rather than providing an intervention point to get the right support in place, entrench poor outcomes for vulnerable children”<sup>12</sup>. The London Rescue and Response project notes a strong correlation between involvement in county lines exploitation and having been excluded<sup>13</sup>.

The vast majority of children and young people grow up safely in Tower Hamlets. However, a minority of children and young people face significant risks from serious youth violence and/or exploitation. Whilst every incident of injury or harm is one too many, declining volumes of knife crime with injury and serious youth violence offer a promising starting point for this strategy:

Year (April to March)	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Knife Crime Injury Victims 1-24	120	111	90
Knife Crime Injury Victims Not DA 1-24	114	110	79
Serious Youth Violence	310	323	286

An Equality Impact Assessment was prepared to support the development of the strategy. It draws on research and service-level data to provide an indication of which young people are likely to victims and/or perpetrators of violence and exploitation. Of particular relevance to this strategy is the age profile of victims and/or perpetrators which shows no clear cut-off at age 18: for example, around 3 in 10 of all victims and all suspects in recently recorded street-based knife crime are aged between 19 and 25 years. The partnership’s understanding of which children and young people are vulnerable to harm will continue to be developed through the life of the strategy with equality monitoring and analysis considered in each annual review. There will be a strong focus on culturally competent communications and support to the borough’s diverse young people and families, on ensuring that every young child and young person is receives support which respects their dignity and worth and on identifying unmet need and less visible impacts, for example, the impact of serious violence on girls and young women and of sexual exploitation on boys and young men.

<sup>9</sup> Brennan, I. (forthcoming). Victims of serious violence in England and Wales, 2011 – 2017. College of Policing, quoted in Wieshman et al, op.cit

<sup>10</sup> Tower Hamlets, 2020 Borough Profile

<sup>11</sup> Exclusions in Secondary Schools: Scrutiny Review

<sup>12</sup> The Timpson Review of School Exclusions, May 2019

<sup>12</sup> The Timpson Review of School Exclusions, May 2019

<sup>13</sup> Rescue and Response County Lines Project, Strategic (August) Assessment 2019

The drivers of serious violence and exploitation affecting young people are complex and dynamic. Overall, the current picture in Tower Hamlets is one where a highly developed drugs market is considered to be a greater driver of violence than gang activity or post-code rivalries, and where the number of people reported to be involved in 'county lines' criminal exploitation is not as great as in some other inner London boroughs<sup>14</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have led to a decline in serious youth violence in the short term. The medium term impacts of the emergency are yet to be seen and are likely to be complex: with commentators pointing to hardship for young people and their families and time spent out of school and online creating conditions for greater vulnerability, transport and movement restrictions leading to increased local recruitment by county lines operators and reduced 'export' of young Londoners to counties, and disrupted drugs markets leading to greater violence<sup>15</sup>

## Definitions and focus areas

The definitions used in this document largely follow government definitions:

Serious violence affecting young people: any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim is aged 1 to 24 years old.

Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (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. 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. 'County lines' is a form of child criminal exploitation, and is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and young people to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

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

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<sup>14</sup> Rescue and Response County Lines Project, *ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Crest Advisory 'County Lines after Covid A new threat', March 2020

A 'gang' is defined as a relatively durable predominantly street-based group of young people who see themselves and are seen by others) as a discernible group and engage in a range of criminal activity and violence. Level 1 - Peer Group – A small unorganised, transient grouping occupying the same space with a common history. Crime is not integral to their self-definition; Level 2 - Street Gang – A relative durable, predominantly street based group of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the groups identity; Level 3 - An organised criminal network – A group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain. The gain is mostly measured in financial terms. Crime is their “occupation”.

The focus of this strategy is mainly on organised exploitation undertaken by groups or networks of adults or sometimes peers. It will complement and support other work to safeguard children and young adults from harm, including other kinds of harm outside the family such as the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation, which is the focus of the Prevent programme. We recognise that underneath the terms 'violence' and 'exploitation' are multi-faceted issues, victims are diverse and may also be perpetrators, and solutions may be complex. Some very serious instances of violence affecting young people may be driven by interpersonal rivalry, trauma or mental health problems. Partners will continue to work with young people and others to better understand and respond the changing local drivers of violence and to consider the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on these drivers.

## **Three principles will guide implementation of this strategy**

### **1. The rights, potential and wishes of children and young people.**

Children and young people's voices will shape all services. Staff will recognise the complexity of children's lives, always seek positive opportunities and never give up on children or young people or regard them as 'non-engagers'. Staff will respect the dignity and worth of everyone regardless of their abilities, gender, sexual orientation, religion or ethnic or religious background.

### **2. A whole-systems approach.**

Partnership working will seek opportunities to meet children and young people's needs: working together and with residents and communities, with a shared sense of responsibility towards young people, so that young people get the right support at the right time. Parents and carers will be central to the way that partners support young people through a 'think family' approach.

### **3. A rigorous, dynamic approach to evidence.**

Partners will agree priorities, identify interventions and evaluate impact using evidence. Evidence includes quantitative and qualitative data, and children and families' experiences and perspectives. The partnership will learn lessons from other areas, and will regularly refresh its knowledge, particularly in response to the Coronavirus emergency and its implications for adolescent safeguarding, and

in learning from thematic reviews, research and good practice within the borough and from organisations such as the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit.

## **Promoting wellbeing and resilience from early years: Every Chance for Every Child**

This strategy is underpinned by the commitment in the Tower Hamlets Children and Families Strategy to ensuring every chance for every child to be happy, healthy, safe and successful. The foundations of a safe adolescence lie both in children's early years and in an environment where children are listened to, are safe and valued, support to children and families in their early years and addressing adverse child experiences, safe spaces, an inclusive education system where all children can thrive, and the right support at the right time for children who need it such as children with SEND and those supported by children's social care.

This strategy complements other work focused on protecting children and young people from harm as they become independent and their peers and adults outside the family play an increasingly important part of their lives. Local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties – set out in the statutory guidance "Working Together to safeguard children" – to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area and to tackle harms beyond the family, including those that children encounter online. The Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership maintains oversight of work keeping children and young people safe and works closely with the Community Safety Partnership. Partners' work to safeguard children and young people from the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation through the Prevent and Channel programmes, action to address trafficking and modern slavery, and the action that partners take against gendered violence against girls and young women as part of the borough's Violence against Women and Girls Strategy all play a vital role in keeping young people safe and complement this strategy.

## Priority One

### Prevention and early intervention

#### **What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?**

Children and young people at risk of exploitation or serious violence and their families are identified, get the support they need at the right time and are protected from serious harm as a result

#### **Why is this important?**

Violence is preventable, not inevitable. From 'Troubled Lives, Tragic Consequences'<sup>16</sup> and other thematic reviews, it is clear that many children who are exploited or affected by serious violence have a difficult start in life with experiences of family violence, trauma and disrupted education, but that opportunities to identify them and intervene early are often missed. Young people from supportive and secure backgrounds can also become vulnerable to violence and harm outside the family. Effective early intervention will help protect young people against serious violence and exploitation, as well as against other kinds of harm including radicalisation and violent extremism.

Tower Hamlets' approach to early intervention will also focus on 'reachable moments', making sure that the right support is available for families and young people whenever it is needed, whether it is when a child goes missing, is arrested, has problems at school, or attends A&E. Projects such as the Violent Crime Reduction Project, for children and young people seen at the emergency department at the Royal London Hospital, the St Giles Trust's work with young people admitted to trauma wards at the Royal London Hospital, and the Breaking the Cycle of Violence project for children who have been arrested but not charged, offer rich opportunities for supporting young people, addressing trauma and mental health issues, and learning about how best to meet their needs.

'Trusted adults' – the family, friends and the adults who know young people well - are often best placed to support their resilience. Universal services such as education, health and youth provision will play a vital role in supporting young people's resilience and recovery. Such services can identify those who are vulnerable, strengthen the protective factors around young people, identify settings where young people can form healthy and safe relationships in daily life and online, and make sure that young people and adults from across Tower Hamlets' diverse communities can access timely and effective help if they are worried about a young person they know.

#### **What actions will we take?**

Develop communications in partnership with young people, community groups and families, and education providers so young people and families understand consent,

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<sup>16</sup> Troubled Lives, Tragic Consequences, Tower Hamlets Local Safeguarding Children Board, December 2015



what constitutes grooming, abuse and assault online and offline, and how to get help.

Equip staff across all agencies with consistent screening and assessment tools, skills, learning and improvement support to help them recognise and respond to the signs of serious violence, child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation and other forms of violence.

Work alongside parents, families, children and young people, voluntary, community, youth and faith groups to build understanding of exploitation and violence and to support positive futures for young people.

Continue to work with schools across the borough so that all children and young people remain in education and are supported to achieve their aspirations.

Continue to develop and act on an understanding of children who may be at risk of future harm and exploitation, including as a result of trauma and poor mental health, and key opportunities for intervention.

Audit existing and new interventions at 'reachable moments' to ensure a joined-up, timely and effective response to safeguarding children and young people and support parents/carers. This will include a focus on getting the right expertise and support in place for children and young people who are at risk from repeated exposure to violence, but may not meet thresholds for statutory intervention.

Develop and implement a locally-driven partnership approach to contextual safeguarding so that public spaces become safe spaces for all children and young people in the borough, with a focus on a responsible adult presence in safe spaces, including through detached youth work.

Build a focus on safeguarding adolescents and supporting their wellbeing and good mental health across post-pandemic recovery planning.

### **What outcomes will be achieved by (end of the strategy)?**

- Children and young people at risk are effectively protected from harm through early intervention.
- Children and young people at risk of exclusion or dropping out of education are supported to stay in mainstream schools, where this is the best option for them.
- Young people and families from different backgrounds within our community know how to access support for themselves and their peers, and seek help when they need it.

### **How will we know we are making a difference?**

- An increase in the use of the partnership exploitation screening tool to identify children where there are early signs of risk.
- Reviews of cases demonstrate that concerns are being identified earlier and action taken to avoid statutory intervention.
- A reduction in the numbers of children and young people in at risk groups.
- A reduction in the number of young people who are persistently absent from school without authorisation.

- A reduction in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- An increase in the number of children being identified by different stakeholders as at risk of exploitation or violence and receiving early support

### **Case study: keeping pupils safe after school**

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on family and contextual violence reviewed temporal patterns in violent incidents in Tower Hamlets between 2015 and 2017 and found that incidents affecting children aged 10 to 16 years peaked in the after school period. During the autumn term 2020, the police-led Operation Teschel worked to reduce violence, robbery and anti-social behaviour during the after school period. The operation combined education and awareness for young people about how to protect themselves and their property, with high-visibility policing every weekday between 3pm and 6pm. The operation focused on areas surrounding schools, pupils' travel routes home, and places where groups of young people were congregating, based on concerns identified by schools in Tower Hamlets and on dynamic information and intelligence.

## Priority Two

### Protection and ongoing support for children and young people at the highest risk of harm and those who are survivors

#### What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?

Children and young people who are affected by exploitation or serious violence receive appropriate, persistent support that helps to reduce the risks they face, find alternative pathways and rebuild their lives.

#### Why is this important?

Children and young people who are victims of sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation, or serious violence, are extremely vulnerable and at high risk of injury, harm and even death. They need support to address the multiple levels of abuse they face – physical, emotional, sexual and financial – as well the trauma and loss that may have contributed to their vulnerability in the first place.

Support is not straightforward. Young people who are victims of violence or exploitation may in some circumstances also be involved in harming others. Poverty and the ability to support families and siblings are an important driver for some young people. Services need to be persistent, flexible and trauma-informed to meet the needs of young people whose lives may be chaotic, or who may be subject to coercion, threats and debt bondage. Some children may be living outside the borough. Young people need to be heard and be part of their own safety planning: trust, hope and practical opportunities are part of keeping safe and recovery. Identifying the times, locations and contexts when young people may be at the greatest risk is an important part of safeguarding and the partnership will develop a contextualised safeguarding response to these risks.

Vulnerability does not stop when children reach their 18th birthday. 18 to 24 year olds make up some of those in the borough at the highest risk of harm, but their needs, and that of 16 and 17 year olds, may be different to those of younger children, with safe housing, work or training, as well as mental health, as priorities.

#### What actions will we take?

Provide children at the highest risk with accessible, responsive support from the exploitation team, and ensuring that wider care planning for all children with a social worker safeguards children effectively, reflecting best practice and taking into account contextual risks.

Ensure that children's wishes and feelings are central to decisions about their support and engage parents and carers as protective partners, sharing risks and solutions.

Promote the full utilisation of statutory and regulatory powers across the partnership to ensure that children and young people at risk of or suffering serious violence, child criminal and child sexual exploitation are protected quickly and effectively, building confidence amongst families and children that the system will make a difference.

Share information routinely, accurately, with consent wherever possible and in accordance with local protocols, which will be updated annually.

Share intelligence about individual cases and wider patterns of risk, including identifying and tackling contextual safeguarding risks.

Promote an approach to supporting survivors across the partnership which is centred on children and young people's needs and perspectives, is holistic, trauma-informed, and focuses on young people's strengths and the importance of building trusting relationships over a sustained period.

Develop a clear picture of the needs of young adults at the highest risk from violence and exploitation as victims and/or perpetrators, and agree a set of realistic, agreed actions underway to address these needs, with a focused use of capacity and resources across the partnership.

### **What outcomes will be achieved by (end of the strategy)?**

- Professionals across partner agencies have the understanding they need of serious youth violence, child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation in Tower Hamlets to effectively protect and support our children and young people.
- Young people at the highest risk from violence and exploitation, as victims and/or perpetrators, are kept safe and are supported to fulfil their potential, develop positive relationships and improve their health and wellbeing.
- Effective measures are in place to reduce the risk to children and young people when they are in public spaces or online.

### **How will we know we are making a difference?**

- Reviews of cases demonstrate that children and young people at the highest risk have been effectively safeguarded.
- Reviews of cases show that children and young people who are survivors of serious violence or exploitation have been supported to make progress with their lives, in education, work, relationships or wellbeing.
- Children and young people's feedback demonstrates they value the support provided.
- Reduction in reported incidents of violence or exploitation in key locations or at key times (such as the after-school period) across the borough

### **Case study: Putting children's wishes at the heart of support**

Over a two-year period, Tower Hamlets' multi-agency exploitation team worked with a young person who was being sexually exploited at the time they were referred to the service. At first, the number of professionals involved was overwhelming, so the young person's social worker discussed with them who they wanted to work with, who they felt they had a good relationship with and how they wanted to engage.

Although fortnightly professional meetings continued, the young person themselves did not need to engage with all professionals all of the time. Over time, the risks to the young person reduced, they participated regularly in youth services and returned to education.

**Case study: Making the borough a safer place for the most vulnerable children**

In 2019, the joint project Operation Makesafe worked with local hotels to raise awareness of exploitation and around responsibilities for licensing. Hotel staff are primed to identify suspicious situations in relation to exploitation and protecting children. The project has been credited with improving the speed of reporting and better protecting children within the night-time economy.

## Priority Three

### Disrupting and pursuing those who pose a risk to children and young people

#### What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?

The risk to children and young people from those who would seek to criminally or sexually exploit them, or involve them in violence, is reduced.

#### Why is this important?

Much of this strategy rightly focuses on supporting children, young people and their families to prevent harm. However, young people have the right to grow up a safe environment, where the activities of individuals, groups and gangs who seek to harm them are disrupted, and those that are trying to cause harm are held to account for their actions, including through the criminal justice system and through Modern Slavery legislation where appropriate.

Effective disruption and support to the most vulnerable young people goes hand in hand with building the trust of young people from all backgrounds and their families in public services and the police.

#### What actions will we take?

Support proactive intelligence gathering by the police, including the development of problem and subject profiles and network analysis, supported by other professionals. This will include understanding what more can be done to address the violence and exploitation linked to street drugs markets.

Promote proactive use of disruption techniques, and civil orders, to disrupt perpetrator contact with (potential) victims.

Support proactive pursuit of criminal prosecutions, focused on those who exploit young people for profit or gain.

Consider, within the multi-agency partnership the complexities of peer perpetration and the potential for victim/perpetrator overlap within this.

Build trust and cooperation between young people and local communities, and the police and public services, including clear and factual communications about incidents, ensuring that stop and search measures are seen to be used fairly, proportionally and respectfully.

#### What outcomes will be achieved by (end of the strategy)?

- Criminal activity is disrupted, and partners use the full range of available powers, including civil orders, to prevent perpetrators from contacting children and young people.
- Partners work together to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted, focusing on those who have exploited young people for profit or gain.

- Young people at risk of harming others are prevented from doing so and receive the support they need to address their underlying issues.
- There is mutual trust and co-operation between our young people, communities and public services including the Police, and interventions, such as Stop and Search, are seen to be used fairly, proportionally and respectfully.

### **How will we know we are making a difference? (\*)**

- Reduction in knife crime injury victims aged under 25 years.
- Evidence that early information sharing on areas of concern is leading to successful proactive disruption.
- Increase in referrals of young people to the pan-London Rescue and Response service for intensive support.
- Feedback from young people shows an increased confidence in policing, and in particular stop and search.
- Active disruption and increased criminal prosecutions of those who exploit young people for profit or gain

\*developing measures of progress for this priority is challenging, and these will be further developed as part of operational planning.

### **Case study: Acting swiftly to disrupt exploitation**

A young person disclosed to a partner agency that they were staying in a high-end hotel and had sums of money and goods in the hotel room. When the agency contacted the council's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, the concerns raised led to an emergency strategy meeting being convened. Later the same day, the police went to the hotel, removed the young person to a safe place, and opened an investigation into exploitation.

### **Case study: Bringing perpetrators to justice**

A recent operation concerned five girls where the offender received a custodial sentence in 2019 for two counts of causing a girl to engage in sexual activity, five counts of meeting girls following sexual grooming, supplying cannabis and an unrelated charge of making indecent photographs of children. The police and the council's Children's Social Care teams worked closely together throughout this case. Information and intelligence have been shared with the police by Children's Social Care that has led to and supported the criminal charges being brought against the perpetrator in respect of 15 child sex offences. The Exploitation team Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) coordinator supported all five young people throughout the court process. All of the children involved in the investigation were all supported by the CSE coordinator and Social Workers throughout the whole investigation including the court process. They were taken to court and given an opportunity to look around the court room. The CSE coordinator also supported this process with the police. Where it was felt by the police that the children were struggling or finding the process difficult, the CSE coordinator (a qualified social worker with enhanced training) and Social workers would go out and support the young people and feedback relevant information to the police and support them in giving statements.

## Making it happen

Partnership working is vital to tackle exploitation and serious violence. Across Tower Hamlets, young people and residents, community and faith groups, and many services and projects are already working tirelessly to keep young people safe and support them. The challenge now is to enhance the level of strategic coordination in order to achieve the effective, decisive, timely support to children and young people envisaged in this strategy.

The Community Safety Partnership will have overall responsibility for the Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy, ensuring links with Tower Hamlets' Violence Reduction Plan.

The Vulnerable Young People and Exploitation sub-group of the Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership will be responsible for the delivery of the outcomes set out in this strategy. It will take the lead in developing a cross-agency operational plan, overseeing implementation and monitoring outcomes, reflecting new evidence and research in planning, and engaging with children and young people, families and community and faith groups, and voluntary and statutory organisations. The sub-group reports routinely to the Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership and will report annually on progress against the strategy to the Community Safety Partnership.

The Children and Families Partnership Board, Health and Wellbeing Board, Safeguarding Adults Board, and Youth Justice Management Board, and head teacher consultative groups are important stakeholders and will be kept updated and engaged.

## Reporting arrangements

