

**London Adolescent Safeguarding
Overview Board**

**Peer Review of MACE
Arrangements in
London**

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PART 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the report

1. This report sets out the findings of an evaluation of Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) arrangements in London. The work was commissioned by the London Adolescent Safeguarding Board (LASOB) and conducted between January and June 2022.¹
2. The MACE meeting is central to the multi-agency response to safeguarding children and young people from extra-familial harm and exploitation.² The MACE arrangements are set out in the London Child Exploitation Operating Protocol 4th edition (subsequently referred to as ‘the protocol’) which was published and launched in March 2021.³ The contents and evolution of this document are discussed in Part 2 of this report.

1.2 Peer review method

3. The MACE peer review evaluation had two elements: 1) a self-assessment of local MACE arrangements returned on behalf of 24 of 32 London boroughs and 2) six peer review meetings in which local partnerships participated, building on the information provided in the self-assessment.⁴ The purpose of both was to promote reflection on the progress that local safeguarding children partnerships (LSCPs) have made in implementing the MACE arrangements envisaged in the protocol. At the outset it was anticipated that the evaluation would produce suggestions as to how the existing protocol could be improved. It was not expected that every local authority would have implemented the protocol in the same way, though consistency in approach and the consistent adoption of successful ways of working would evidently have advantages, particularly in work across local authority, police and health boundaries.
4. Details of the project team, participating representatives from local authorities, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and the NHS are set out in Appendix 1, together with a list of the local authorities that returned self-assessment questionnaires. Appendix 2 is a copy of the materials used for the self-assessment. Although there is no expectation that this exercise should be repeated, many of the topics in the self-assessment template will remain relevant. Local partnerships in London may choose to revisit them. The material may also be of use to partnerships outside London.⁵

1.3 Structure of the report

5. Part 2 of the report considers aspects of the wider policy context that are relevant to the MACE arrangements, including the concepts of extra-familial harm and exploitation. It identifies the

¹ London Adolescent Safeguarding Overview Board (LASOB) <https://liia.london/liia-programme/adolescent-safeguarding-and-youth-justice>

² The term MACE arrangements and the series of meetings envisaged by the protocol (pre-MACE, Operational MACE and Strategic MACE) are described in Part 2 of the report.

³ <https://cscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-London-Child-Exploitation-Operating-Protocol-2021-MPS.pdf>

⁴ 10 local partnerships were represented in the six peer review meetings.

⁵ Please reference the template as, London Innovation and Improvement Alliance / London Adolescent Safeguarding Overview Board (2022) ‘Multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) self-assessment and peer review template’.

potential significance of the recommendations made in the recently published Independent Review of Children's Social Care which for the first time proposes a national framework for the multi-agency response to safeguarding from harm to children that originates outside the family.⁶

6. Part 3 of the report summarises the combined findings of the self-assessments and peer reviews through a description and evaluation of the meetings held as part of the MACE approach. It describes how partnerships organise their response to concerns about exploitation, from the screening of initial referrals to the development of priorities and responses at a strategic level. Initial referrals are largely focused on individual young people, though the MACE arrangements also envisage concerns being referred about groups of young people, suspected perpetrators of abuse, localities where children are being harmed, and common themes. This part of the report considers information sharing agreements and administrative support, and it describes the ways in which local partnerships believe the MACE approach has had a positive impact.
7. Part 4 evaluates the contribution currently being made to MACE arrangements by local authorities, the MPS, the NHS, and the education sector, describing the contribution and identifying barriers and challenges to greater engagement. It touches briefly on the roles of voluntary organisations in the multi-agency arrangements.
8. In its initial discussion of MACE arrangements, LASOB identified a number of topics which were a particular challenge to partnerships, or where it was clear that there was wide variation in the approach adopted. Part 5 of the report focuses on a number of these, including the following: working across local authority and police borders, the use of data to measure the outcomes and impact of their work, and work with local authority community safety partnerships. This part of the report also considers the extent to which children's partnerships are able to work with colleagues in adult services to offer additional support to young adults who are considered to be at risk of exploitation.
9. Part 6 of the report considers the question of variation between local authority areas, making suggestions as to where consistency across London should be expected, and could be achieved. It also highlights areas in which legitimate local variation is to be expected. Part 7 sets out the review recommendations. Parts 1,2,6 and 7 provide the best overview of the report's context and recommendations. Parts 3,4 and 5 provide supporting evidence from the self-assessments, peer reviews and wider literature.

Approach to learning

10. The aim of the project team was to promote an honest discussion of the progress that has been made by local partnerships, as well as exploring barriers and challenges. At each stage the project team tried to encourage critical reflection, recognising that safeguarding children from criminal and sexual exploitation is often extremely difficult and that the MACE has a complex and challenging role. The project team made a commitment that the evaluation would not identify the local authority areas that participated in the peer review sessions except when, with the agreement of local representatives, it identified positive approaches which should be highlighted. Examples considered to be successful by local partners are summarised, usually

⁶ Josh MacAlister (2022) Independent Review of Children's Social Care <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/> Part 3.3 of the MacAlister review sets out proposals for a policy framework and suggests key elements of procedures, including the development of a Child Community Safety Plan.

without the need to reference a particular authority. The report quotes anonymously from self-assessment returns and peer reviews when a contributor described an issue in a typical or useful way. Further details of useful approaches can be shared once it has been decided what work is to be undertaken to implement the recommendations of the review.

11. This was not an inspection. The project team did not examine case records or observe meetings, so it was not able to make detailed independent judgements on the standard of practice or the impact of particular MACE arrangements. When local partners reported positive outcomes, we sought to explore these in order to understand them better. Challenges and shortcomings reported have been discussed in order to understand underlying causes and to develop recommendations that might be more widely applicable.
12. At the outset it is important to note that there are currently no established, comprehensive approaches that have been shown to address adolescent safeguarding harm or the problems of exploitation and serious youth violence. It is not, therefore, a question of asking why known, successful solutions were not being implemented. The project team is very aware of the risks and benefits that arise when local partnerships volunteer for additional, external scrutiny in a contentious area of safeguarding activity. The project team wishes to thank everyone who participated for committing their time and for taking the risk.
13. There is a significant body of research and writing on exploitation and extra-familial harm. At a number of points in this report, relevant research documents and websites are referenced, usually when they have already explored at length areas touched on by the peer review. Sadly practitioners and managers who have full time operational responsibilities rarely have the time to read this literature. As well as encouraging others to read work that seems useful, referencing existing literature should help avoid the commissioning of further research or activity covering the same ground. This report is not an academic study and it makes no claim to have looked comprehensively at any of the topics discussed, or to have reviewed all the relevant literature. The focus here is on the local organisational oversight of the activity needed to deliver and coordinate services work to safeguard children from exploitation: organisational arrangements and processes; the agendas of panels; frustration that colleagues do not attend meetings; arrangements for sharing information when a child moves from one local area to another; and communication between different teams and services. Often dull, necessarily repetitive, absolutely essential.

Aspects of the MACE arrangements that are not considered

14. The aims of the MACE peer review have been 1) to examine how far the operational protocol has been implemented in practice and to understand why that is 2) to seek to understand whether particular approaches seem to be more effective than others. The protocol exists because, in the absence of any other guidance, it provided a necessary a framework for coordinating work to combat exploitation. It has succeeded in this aim and has supported a huge amount of important local activity which has benefited many young people. It is a work in progress and it needs to be revised, for reasons set out throughout this report. A number of other questions about the protocol and the MACE arrangements could legitimately be explored. For example, how much do parents and young people know when individuals are being discussed in MACE meetings? Do they have a right to know? And might it make the work more effective if they did? What is the best way to balance the need for professionals to have forums in which they can discuss the needs of young people who are at high levels of risk with the rights of parents? How would that fit with the responsibilities of participating agencies? These and

other interesting questions are beyond the scope of this project, but should be considered as MACE arrangements evolve.

A note on authorship

15. The project has been collaborative. A small project team met regularly online to shape the project, to reflect on the learning as it emerged, drawing on: 1) the material generated by the project, 2) considerable person experience of work to tackle exploitation, extra-familial harm and serious youth violence and 3) some knowledge of the relevant research. In conducting the peer reviews the project team was joined by colleagues from local authorities, the NHS and the MPS, who have also had opportunities to bring their experience of front-line activity and management oversight to the work, including involvement in many MACE meetings. A group of professionals with full time operational roles cannot collectively write a report so it fell to the lead author to draft, consult on and finalise this report. Much of the content reflects the very fruitful discussions in project meetings. The lead author has had to decide how best to express the findings of the project. He is happy to be held responsible for errors and omissions, as well as views that may not be shared by everyone who was involved.

PART 2 CURRENT AND RECENT CONTEXT

2.1 Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 and the London Safeguarding Children Procedures

16. MACE is part of the multi-agency arrangements to respond to the exploitation of children and young people and to extra-familial harm. These terms entered national statutory guidance only recently. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 widened the definition of safeguarding responsibilities to encompass exploitation in addition to the established terms ‘neglect’ and ‘abuse’. Exploitation is said to exist when an imbalance of power is used ‘*to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into criminal or sexual activity*’. Extra-familial harm might include ‘*exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking, online abuse; sexual exploitation and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation*’.⁷ Risks may arise ‘*from within (the child’s) family and from individuals they come across in their day-to-day lives*’. (page 9). The guidance noted that ‘*extra-familial threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or more widely from within the wider community and/or online*’. (page 23)⁸
17. Beyond these broad definitions, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 gave no detailed indication as to the type of procedures or organisational arrangements that should be used to respond to extra-familial harm or exploitation, in either statutory or less formal guidance. Government funding has supported academic research and the development of pilot projects

⁷ Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 page 23 and Appendix A

⁸ In the 2018 guidance this material formed part of a section on ‘contextual safeguarding’. When the guidance was reissued with minor updates in December 2020, references to contextual safeguarding had been removed, with the focus instead being on ‘Assessment of risk outside the home’. Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (reissued December 2020, page 25). The current (2020) edition can be accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-together-to-safeguard-children--2>

to develop and test new approaches. Often these highlighted perceived inadequacies in the existing statutory framework and proposed alternative models of practice.⁹

18. In London the development of policy and procedures has largely taken place at borough level, with a variety of approaches emerging. Following a number of serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews identifying risks arising from the resulting inconsistency, minor amendments were made to the London Safeguarding Children Procedures. The changes were designed to confirm that extra-familial harm fell within the concept of significant harm and (by implication) the existing procedures applied.¹⁰ Consultation on the changes indicated that local authorities and partnerships were adopting a range of approaches to the use of child protection procedures. It is not clear whether, following the update, approaches subsequently became more consistent. The material gathered in the MACE peer review does not explore this question, however it does confirm that partnerships continue to take a variety of approaches.

2.2 Development of operational protocols to coordinate the response to different forms of child exploitation

Development and governance of the protocol

19. To provide standard operating procedures for its officers and staff, and with the aim of achieving greater consistency in practice across London, the MPS has led the production of a series of protocols on exploitation. The first three editions of the protocol focused exclusively on child sexual exploitation, reflecting the need to address widely acknowledged failings in the response over more than a decade to the emergence of large-scale, street-based grooming and sexual abuse. The 4th edition seeks to address the full range of harms cited in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018, with terminology and acronyms shifting from MASE (sexual exploitation) to MACE. Necessarily, some detailed material on sexual exploitation had to be removed, to the regret of some safeguarding partnerships.
20. Broadening the remit of the protocol to include all forms of exploitation has presented a number of challenges which were less explicit while the focus of work was largely on sexual exploitation. Some are organisational and managerial, for example the much larger range of police activity that needs to be considered within a multi-agency framework, and the greater overlap between safeguarding and community safety partnership responsibilities. There is also a professional and intellectual challenge. While similarities and overlaps between harms commonly grouped together as exploitation are stressed (such as the role of coercion) published research and discussion has focused much less attention on important differences between sexual and criminal exploitation (for example, the nature of the contributory risk factors, and the extent to which some young people move from being exploited to actively exploiting others).
21. While the protocol has been endorsed by the London Safeguarding Children Partnership and the document includes references the London Safeguarding Children Procedures, the two are not integrated, and they are published and accessed separately. The objective of the protocol is to *'help practitioners, local leaders and decision makers who work with children and families*

⁹ See for example <https://www.csnetwork.org.uk/toolkit> based largely on work in Hackney

¹⁰ https://www.londonsafeguardingchildrenprocedures.co.uk/responding_concerns.html Difficulty in arriving at a consensus as to the best approaches meant that no substantial revision was made to the procedures.

to identify children vulnerable to exploitation and take appropriate action in response'.¹¹ The 4th edition of the protocol does not state clearly whether local authorities, the MPS or LSCPs should be responsible for implementing it and overseeing its effectiveness. Our impression is that most LSCPs have taken on this role, though they do so in very different ways. There is also currently no framework of governance across London as a whole for the implementation of the protocol. This is evidently needed and this report will recommend that this is urgently resolved.

Scope and contents

22. As a result of this history, the current operational protocol is a hybrid document providing a range of material including the following: 1) comprehensive of procedures for the MPS, including templates and references to a number of internal MPS processes, 2) multi-agency guidance (for example in relation to MACE arrangements) and 3) some general educational material. The broader the remit, the more difficult it is for a single document to meet all needs. Much of the protocol is intended to be operational and directed at front line staff, while some is more strategic. The protocol is located on the MPS website, though many safeguarding partnerships provide a copy or link. While undoubtedly useful for MPS officers and staff, the extent to which professionals in other agencies access and use the protocol is unknown. Although there was consultation on the production of the protocol 4th edition, it is not clear how far partners outside the police believe it meets the needs of their staff, how many professionals actually read it, and whether it is possible for a single document to be equally relevant to all professionals. These are all issues that should be considered as the protocol is further revised.
23. The main area covered by the existing protocol are listed in Table 1, with brief explanations where necessary in italics.

Table 1 - Summarised content of the London Child Exploitation Operating Protocol (4th edition)	
Introduction	Principles that should inform practice <i>drawn from existing guidance and research</i>
Section 2	Definitions of key terms across the entire range of exploitation <i>drawn from existing guidance and research</i>
Section 3	Headed 'Prevention and Early Intervention' and provides further educational material and brief descriptions of the roles of schools, health services including CAMHS, front line responders and the community. Brief information is provided about a number of topics, including checklists on the effects of trauma. <i>These appear to be aimed at first responders, though they might be useful to others.</i>
Section 4	Headed 'Identifying Child Exploitation' and provides brief generic lists of signs and symptoms. It refers to specific police referral processes (linking to an Appendix in the document). The short section on social care refers to a well-established 4 tier model of need

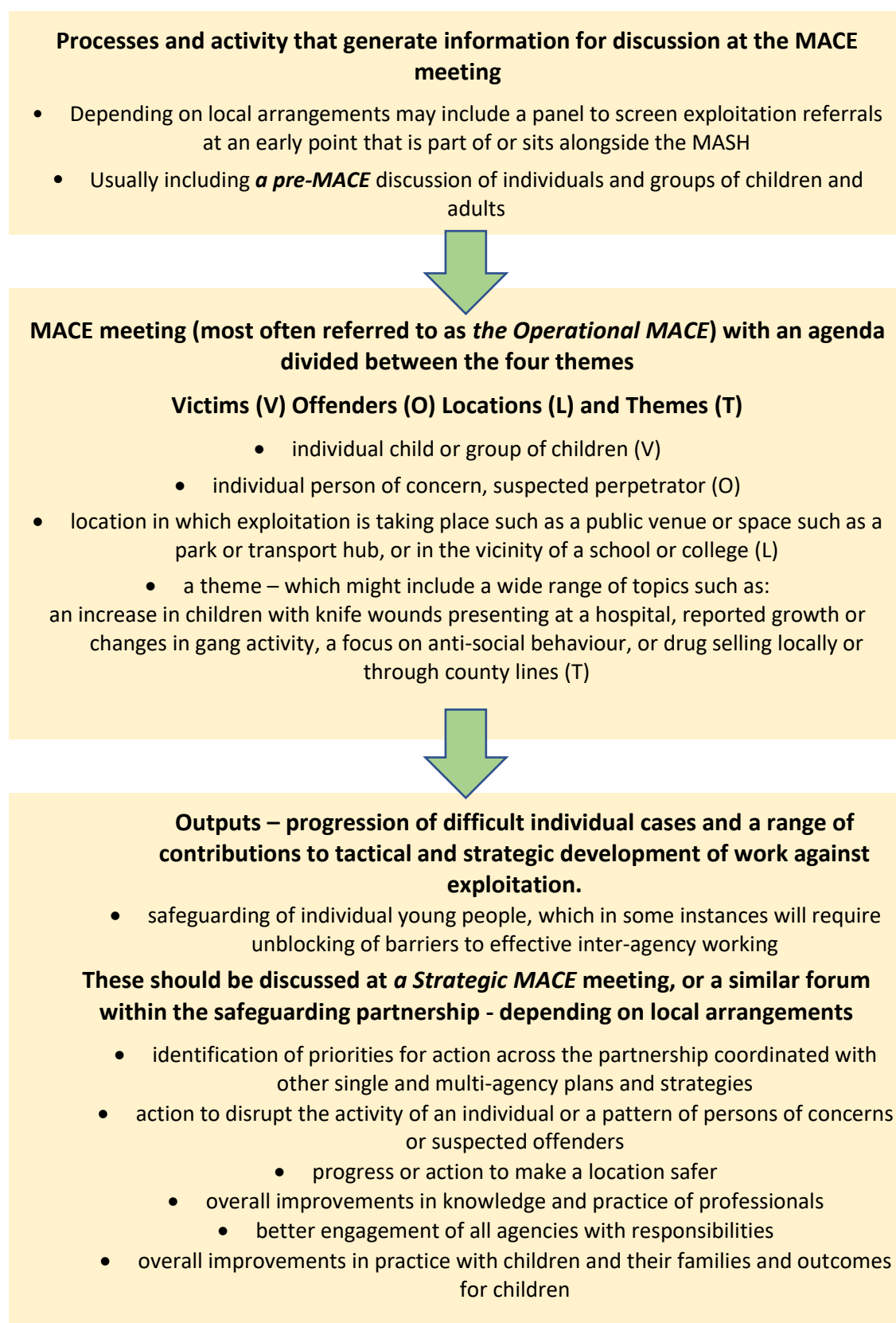
¹¹ [The-London-Child-Exploitation-Operating-Protocol-2021](#), (Chapter 1, Introduction, Page 3)

Section 5	Brief definitions of terms linked to gangs and organised crime groups. It mentions no specific procedures
Section 6	Explains the use of the MPS Form 87a, non-crime child exploitation report. A copy is provided in an Appendix. <i>The 87a is probably the only widely used document on exploitation in London, though it serves a number of different purposes.</i>
Section 7	Deals with intelligence submissions. <i>The target audience is not clear, but this seems most relevant to police officers and staff</i>
Section 8	This explains the role of Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships and provides links to the statutory Working Together guidance. It asserts that the MPS has a strategic lead and is ' <i>responsible for public protection within London</i> ' along with MOPAC and the 32-borough chief executive, with children being one of 13 vulnerable groups. <i>It is not clear what this means, or how it might relate to statutory safeguarding responsibilities.</i>
Section 9	Sets out two paragraphs of actions required by police and local authorities when a child moves placement between boroughs. <i>These are not comprehensive and are known to fall far short of the range of measures that should be taken in these circumstances.</i>
Section 10	Sets out arrangements for multi-agency meetings on exploitation. It refers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strategy discussion (with guidance taken from Working Together) • organised and complex strategy meetings • the MACE meeting The last of these has substantial additional material. It briefly explains the VOLT mnemonic, modern slavery and the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). To different degrees it has provided the basis for local MACE arrangements.
Section 11	Focuses on 'Supporting child victims' and refers to a range of research that shows how this can be done most effectively. It explains the concept of Modern Slavery and how this may be relevant
Section 12	Safeguarding children in custody explains the critical opportunity that arrest and custody may offer as a 'reachable moment' in order to provide safe support and help identify perpetrators of exploitation
Section 13	Provides a detailed account of responsibilities in relation to missing children including the role of the coordinator, the Philomena Protocol, independent and police return interviews and the use of the MPS MERLIN notification
Section 14	Provides a detailed account of tactics that can be employed for the investigation of exploitation and refers to an Appendix which provides a large number of tactical options that police officers and other professionals can consider. This section appears to be for a police audience as it refers to forensic strategy and visually recorded interviews

Section 15	Sets out details of police responsibilities in relation to Trafficking and the NRM
Appendix	Abbreviations
Appendix B	Child exploitation warning signs – ‘SAFEGUARD’ (a police mnemonic)
Appendix C	Additional child exploitation risk indicators
Appendix D	Multi-agency Child Exploitation Meeting (MACE) recommended agenda and list of attendees
Appendix E	Police flags and outcome codes relevant to exploitation (for police use)
Appendix F	87a referral form
Appendix G	BCU to Specialist Crime escalation process (for police use)
Appendix H	Tactical options and legislation (a very detailed account largely covering police powers and criminal sanctions, but also statutory civil remedies and duties)
Appendix I	ALDCS Adolescent safeguarding practice framework

24. The MACE approach envisaged by the protocol is ambitious in seeking to connect safeguarding responses to individual cases, safeguarding in locations, and recurring themes in exploitation with the overall strategic response to extra-familial harm. A simplified version of this thinking is illustrated in Table 2 (see next page).
25. Table 2 makes use of a number of terms that are yet to be defined in statutory guidance. Although there have been pilot studies, detailed evidence of effective methods of intervention is lacking. Extra-familial harm is itself an umbrella term touching on a range of societal concerns such as serious youth violence and sexual exploitation. Self-assessment returns showed significant differences in the names, functions and frequency of meetings held to implement the MACE approach. Appendix 3 (presented as a separate document) summarises the information provided in the returns in relation to the structures of meetings held by different partnerships. As well as being part of the local safeguarding children partnership arrangements, the MACE is expected to relate to other partnerships such as the Community Safety Partnership. Its remit overlaps with a number of other multi-agency strategies and action plans.
26. MACE is an elaborate concept. By way of comparison, there are other multi-agency panel arrangements (for example MARAC dealing with cases of high-risk domestic abuse, and MAPPA dealing with the risk management of specific groups of violent and sexual offenders) which seek only to share information and offer limited coordination of actions to manage risk. In comparison to the MACE, they undertake less ambitious functions but do so within a fully established framework of statute and guidance, something that is not yet in place for child exploitation or extra-familial harm.

Table 2 MACE aspiration - from front line practice to strategic oversight



2.3 The need for statutory guidance on extra-familial harm

27. The national statutory child safeguarding guidance includes broad definitions of exploitation. Beyond this shared starting point, approaches to exploitation are currently all matters for local interpretation, including thresholds for identifying which children should fall within the cohort of those who are exploited or may be vulnerable to exploitation, as well as young people who may fall within a wider adolescent safeguarding cohort. The MACE evaluation has highlighted a number of consequences of the absence of a detailed framework for the management of extra-familial harm. Apart from local custom and practice there is no shared process or method for assessing the risk of exploitation, and no shared thresholds to determine which children merit closer scrutiny and greater support. Interpretations of activity that falls within the definition of exploitation can range from minor incidents to severe sexual or physical harm and death. Without comparable thresholds there no reliable and consistent data, and without data it is impossible to build a reliable profile of the nature and extent of exploitation across London. Without data and agreement on thresholds it is difficult to define objectives beyond what the professionals involved think would be right for the individual case. The limited understanding of the impact made by services makes it more difficult to reach agreement on the best ways to intervene and help.
28. A number of professionals told the review that the lack of an agreed framework also means that the work required to combat exploitation is given less value and priority. For example, independent inspectors may not value the long-term work that is necessary to achieve engagement with a young person if there was no evidence that it has led to readily observable changes in behaviour or reduction in harm. This makes it harder for agencies to justify keeping young people who take a long time to engage on caseloads. A framework that recognised the validity of this style of work would make it easier to argue for this use of resources to tackle extra-familial harm.

2.4 Potential impact of the 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care

29. The recently published Independent Review of Children's Social Care ('the independent review') recommends the creation of an overall national framework for the multi-agency response to safeguarding from harm to children that originates outside the family.¹² Although aspects of the current child protection framework were found to be unsuitable for dealing with extra-familial harm, the independent review decided that with some modification it should be applied to extra-familial harm. Recognising the '*rise in identified extra-familial harm*' and noting that '*significant harm is a consequential threshold*', the review rejects the idea that professional intervention with children who have suffered significant harm as a result of the actions of those outside the family should be exclusively categorised and managed as children in need under Section 17 (Children Act 1989). This, the review found, would '*further distort how child in need work is assessed and overseen*' taking services for children in need further from their original intention as a flexible category of family help.
30. The independent review advocates the introduction of a version of the child protection plan, a Child Community Safety Plan as '*a pathway for harms outside the home... with the same legal*

¹² Josh Macalister (2022) Independent Review of Social Care – Final Report, <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/final-report/> (Section 3.3)

underpinning of section 47’.^{13 14} Such plans would be supported by the development of a modified statutory framework with associated guidance. If this approach were adopted, the system and processes for safeguarding in relation to extra-familial harm would begin to share elements of the current child protection system. Arrangements for assessment and meetings to judge whether young people were at risk from extra-familial harm would be shaped by statutory guidance and implemented in a more uniform way across local authority areas. There would, for example, be a responsibility to determine whether a young person was at risk of significant harm because of exploitation and to convene a meeting in order to agree a plan to protect the young person and assist the family. Given the nature of extra-familial harm, the involvement of the young person and the family, the range of professionals involved, the style of the meeting and the nature of the plan agreed would probably be very different.

31. Regardless of these differences, the consistent introduction of a more structured, administrative approach would create greater consistency. Mirroring the approach currently taken to abuse and neglect caused by the family, a cohort of young people would be identified who were the subject of a Child Community Safety Plan as a result of exploitation or extra-familial harm. Others deemed to be at risk of a lower level of harm would (it is assumed) be categorised as children in need. Such a system would enable a more structured approach to the collection of data about exploitation (as defined by the arrangements) and the administrative process itself. Data could be produced to count referrals, assessments and their outcomes, young people made subject to plans, and the outcomes of those plans, all comparable to the collection of data and performance measures in the current child protection system.
32. While it might provide greater structure and consistency in the assessment, management and oversight of extra-familial harm, the imposition of an administrative framework to deal with extra-familial harm will not in itself eliminate or reduce harm. It might be more open and accountable. Inevitably it would be a more intrusive and bureaucratic experience.¹⁵ The weight given to these concerns will need to be set against the consequences of there not being a framework of statutory guidance on extra-familial harm described in Section 2.3 above.
33. At the time of writing it is not clear whether or how the proposals in the independent review in relation to extra-familial harm will be implemented. The government has created a national implementation board, but it is not clear what priority will be given to this issue.¹⁶ The independent review also contains a number of much more ambitious proposals for reform of

¹³ The independent review is not entirely clear as to the changes in the statutory framework required and at different points makes conflicting comments on this. No doubt this can be resolved.

¹⁴ The proposed term **Child Community Safety Plan** has not been universally welcomed, not least because of the potential for confusion with community safety partnership responsibilities. It is used throughout this report to make clear the link to the Independent Review of Social Care – Final Report not because we think it is ideal.

¹⁵ These issues have been anticipated. See for example: Lauren Wroe ‘County lines’, inequalities and young people’s rights: a moment of pause and reflection, <https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/county-lines-inequalities-and-young-peoples-rights-a-moment-of-pause-and-reflection/> (July 16, 2021) Accessed 20 July 2022). These arguments have been developed further: Lauren Elizabeth Wroe and Jenny Lloyd (2020) Watching over or Working with? Understanding Social Work Innovation in Response to Extra-Familial Harm, Social Sciences, Soc. Sci. 2020, 9, 37; <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/9/4/37>

¹⁶ Children’s Social Care National Implementation Board, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-national-implementation-board>

service provision to children and young people.¹⁷ One possibility is that the specific proposal for the introduction of a Child Community Safety Plan could proceed through the re-writing of the statutory guidance, *Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018*, while broader reforms take longer. The need for revision of the statutory guidance ‘at pace’ was highlighted by the national child safeguarding practice review in 2020.¹⁸

34. It will be useful if decisions are made on this without undue delay. It will also be useful if local authorities and other partners in London decide how they propose to respond to these proposals and whether they think it is legitimate for there to continue to be substantial variation in the way in which partnerships in different local authority areas respond to the challenges of extra-familial harm. A number of local authorities have invested considerable time and effort into the development of bespoke local approaches. It is easy to imagine that they will not want to give them up. At the time of writing, more specific proposals are being developed for pilot work in London on the implementation of the independent review, including aspects of extra-familial harm.
35. Given this uncertainty, the recommendations made in this report may need to be considered, either as a means of improving MACE arrangements as they currently exist (i.e. where partnerships are adopting a range of approaches to extra-familial harm) or as they will be if the proposals for the introduction of the Child Community Safety Plan proceed within a reasonable time. **Part 7 of the report makes recommendations on the need for a multi-agency project to take forward this work, as part of the wider pan-London response.**

¹⁷ For example the creation of a National Children’s Social Care Framework to set the purpose, objectives and outcomes for children’s social care supported by the development of a ‘Balanced Scorecard’; the merger of certain aspects of youth justice and social care activity

¹⁸ ‘We recommend that government moves at pace to review *Working Together*. The Department for Education should bring together the relevant stakeholders to explore how best to ensure the narrative and requirements of *Working Together* reflect the risk of harm from outside the home, with a view to agreeing amendments to the current guidance.’ Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (2020) *It was hard to escape: safeguarding children at risk from criminal exploitation* (pages 40 and 48)

PARTS 3 - 5 PEER REVIEW FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings of the MACE peer review evaluation are set out as follows

PART 3 describes the range of approaches taken by local partnerships MACE arrangements in establishing links between front line responses to exploitation and the strategic development of services. It is arranged as follows:

- The initial response to children identified as being at risk of harm through exploitation
- Screening for discussion at MACE (pre-MACE) and the use of risk assessment formats
- Arrangements to support operations and evaluate the effectiveness of activity (Operational MACE)
- Structures to support strategic oversight and planning of activity (Strategic MACE)
- Coordination and business support
- Arrangements for sharing information
- Reported benefits of MACE arrangements

PART 4 describes and evaluates the contribution to MACE arrangements of the following agencies and sectors:

- Local authority children's services
- MPS
- NHS
- Education, schools and colleges
- Voluntary sector

PART 5 provides a thematic account of a number of aspects of the MACE arrangements that were identified as particularly challenging by LASOB and in the work of the project:

- Production of data and the measurement of impact on young people, other positive benefits
- Community safety and safeguarding in places
- Working across local authority and MPS geographical boundaries
- Work to disrupt exploitation and criminality
- Securing support for young adults who are at risk of exploitation

36. Commentary and recommendations draw on evidence from self-assessment and peer review. The evaluation is able to draw more in more depth on the experience of partnerships that participated in peer review meetings. These do not reflect all the approaches being taken in practice across London, nor do they necessarily represent the most or least effective approaches. The experience of the partnerships that did not complete a self-assessment (or submitted their assessment very late) could not be captured.
37. The terms pre-MACE, Operational MACE and Strategic MACE are used in line with descriptions given in Table 2 as being the best way to understand the function of these meetings and panels. It is recognised that 1) some safeguarding partnerships used different terminology and that 2) in some partnerships, functions are carried out in different meetings or forums. The terms MACE approach and MACE arrangements are used interchangeably to refer to all of the processes and functions in Table 2. Direct quotes from MACE self-assessments and peer reviews are in italics.

PART 3 ESTABLISHING LINKS BETWEEN FRONT LINE RESPONSES TO EXPLOITATION AND THE STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES

3.1 How MACE arrangements seek to establish links between front line responses to exploitation and the strategic development of services

38. Most safeguarding children partnerships structure their MACE arrangements through the terms of reference of a series of meetings or panels. These are designed to 1) address operational difficulties in the safeguarding of young people and 2) generate a better understanding of the range of experiences of young people and the effectiveness of existing services in order to inform the local strategy to combat exploitation. Although there are exceptions, and the names given to groups varies between partnerships, most local arrangements broadly follow the hierarchy of meetings set out in Table 2.¹⁹ Details of the meetings held by partnerships that submitted self-assessments are set out in Appendix 3 which is presented as a separate document.
39. Some self-assessments refer to very positive arrangements in which it is possible to escalate difficult individual cases to the attention of more senior managers who can bring to bear a more flexible approach, allocate additional resources and unblock difficulties in multi-agency working or take strategic decisions. They also point to decisions about strategy and prioritisation of work on exploitation that have developed from discussion in the MACE. Others partnerships note that meeting to discuss cases and themes does not necessarily lead to effective action. The most commonly given concern is that meetings suffer from a lack of feedback, a lack of timeliness in follow-up, and failure to implement decisions or recommendations made. One self-assessment noted that *'although they are tracked from each meeting, there are not always clear timeframes for the completion of actions and recommendations'*. Agencies sometimes lack the capacity to act on concerns. It is not always clear what should happen if discussion doesn't result in a consensus.
40. Some of this variation will certainly reflect differences in efficiency, competence and capacity, rather than anything specific to the MACE approach. Some partnerships have achieved a settled and well-functioning set of MACE arrangements. When this happens, professionals are clear about the functions of meetings, which agencies should be represented and the responsibilities of attendees. Other partnerships describe obvious shortcomings including uncertainty over the purpose of meetings and poorly organised agendas; confusion over who should attend with representation delegated to less senior professionals; inconsistent chairing, and meetings that seem to duplicate one another. In the absence of a shared understanding the way in which the MACE arrangements should function, and the administrative ability to make the practical arrangements work, these negative features tend to reinforce one another.
41. A recurring theme in discussions about the effectiveness of local arrangements has been the importance of chairing the key multi-agency meetings, the need for chairs to be clear about the purpose of meetings and to be able to run them effectively. **The review will recommend that the London Children Safeguarding Partnership should consider how best to promote the training for Operational MACE chairs and the provision of a network of continuing support for chairs.** The challenge of chairing complex meetings effectively is reinforced by the rapid

¹⁹ Partnerships were asked to supply copies of terms of reference for their meetings. Some had reviewed their terms of reference and meeting structures in order to bring them in line with the protocol after March 2021. A number of partnerships indicated that terms of reference and structures were under review in early 2022.

turnover in key staff in the MPS which is discussed further in Section 4.2. Until the MPS addresses this issue, MACE arrangements will fall short of their potential.

3.2 The initial multi-agency response to children identified as being at risk of harm through exploitation

42. Prior to discussion at any MACE meeting, safeguarding young people from exploitation begins with the assessment and initial management of referrals and updates on incidents. Although not falling within the scope of the MACE approach described in the protocol, arrangements for initial screening and risk assessment influence the work that might then be referred to the MACE or pre-MACE discussion. Processes vary between partnerships.
43. Variation in local practice is not surprising because the response to the exploitation of children is a complex system:
 - Young people may be referred over safeguarding and exploitation concerns in a number of ways and this varies between local authorities (i.e. there are different 'points of entry')
 - Attention may be drawn to a young person either as a new referral or if a young person known to services is involved in a serious incident
 - Local arrangements reflect different local concerns and priorities e.g. boroughs with a history of a high level of gang activity are more likely to have joint or integrated gangs teams; some boroughs formed joint police and social care exploitation teams; some boroughs have 'overnight' meetings each morning at which police information on incidents occurring over the previous 24 or 48 hours is shared and actions agreed.
 - There are differences in approaches to risk assessment and case allocation. Some local authorities allocate children to teams and services according to the level of risk (child protection being the highest) whereas others may allocate lead professional responsibility to the service they believe is most likely to succeed in engaging the young person (possibly a youth voluntary worker)
 - Police structures vary and police teams allocate children to officers in different ways in different BCUs, some offering a coordinating role, others focused on investigative responsibilities. This is explored further below (see Section 4.2).
44. A number of local partnerships hold a regular risk assessment panel (commonly once or twice per week) to provide initial screening of exploitation referrals in parallel with or in addition to screening by the MASH. These panels have developed in response to the emergence of growing numbers of exploitation referrals and enable specialist practitioners to meet regularly in order to give advice or coordinate responses. Depending on the local model, panels advise or decide on the initial response and may divert a referral to a particular service (for example early help, targeted youth support, or to a voluntary organisation).
45. The effectiveness of these panels has not been evaluated and this should be a matter for local partnerships. Some local authorities are concerned that the existence of such a panel may lead to confused decision making and accountability. As a result they choose to manage exploitation referrals through the established child protection arrangements. A number of local authorities operate versions of both child protection and panel approaches in parallel, believing that they are compatible. Difficulties in securing attendance at such panels, particularly from agencies such as the NHS, education services and housing services are reported. Difficulties arise for the MPS and NHS if officers are expected to attend panels in more than one authority, and / or when local authority arrangements across the BCU differ.

46. Most authorities state that child protection procedures are used to assess and manage risks of exploitation. However interpretation of what ‘following the procedures’ means in practice varies. There is no comprehensive information about the range of practice across London, but the following approaches have been observed:
- Some local authorities convene strategy meetings and will undertake a Section 47 investigation if there appears to be a risk of significant harm. They do not usually hold a child protection conference if the source of the harm to a child is assessed as being extra-familial. A series of strategy meetings or a child in need meetings may be convened instead, even when it is clear that the child has suffered significant harm.
 - Some authorities convene child protection conferences following the Section 47 enquiry, but will usually make the young person the subject of a CIN plan. Some authorities refer to ‘enhanced child in need plans’.
 - Two of the peer review partnerships reported that they had developed a form of plan focused on harm outside the family which was believed to be outside the control of parents.²⁰ There is also variation as to how such plans are overseen and reviewed.
 - Other partnerships apply the child protection procedures in full and make exploited children who have suffered significant harm the subject of a child protection plan.
 - It is likely that some partnerships adopt the approach that they believe best fits the perceived circumstances of the young person (i.e. there is local case to case variation within the pan-London variation).
47. The information obtained by the MACE peer review has highlighted substantial differences in the approaches taken to the assessment and management of risk in different partnerships. There is no objective way of determining which of the approaches described is most effective and it is likely that there would be different and strongly held views as to what criteria would be used to measure effectiveness.
48. It is useful to distinguish between deliberate adoption of different processes and procedures from the natural variation in the detail of such plans that might arise according to differences in local problem profiles, cultures of practice and access to resources. Part 6 of this report distinguishes some areas in which variation might be legitimate and proposes areas in which it would be either wasteful or undermine working across local authorities.
49. The picture is made more complicated by the recommendation of the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care for the development of a Child Community Safety Plan and uncertainty as to whether and how that recommendation is going to be implemented. If the independent review proposal for the development of a Child Community Safety Plan is implemented in a firm and consistent way, the range of approaches described would be substantially reduced.

3.3 Screening for discussion at MACE (pre-MACE) and the use of risk assessment templates

50. The nature of the work undertaken and the configuration of meetings and panels held at an early stage in case management inevitably has an impact on the type of cases considered by the operational MACE meeting. Systems for identifying young people who may be at risk of serious exploitation vary. Some partnerships require referral by a local authority social worker, while others are more open to direct referral from other agencies. Self-assessments differ in their

²⁰ In one partnership this is termed a Contextual Safeguarding and Exploitation Plan. The other referred to it as a ‘bespoke child exploitation plan’.

accounts of the quality of referrals and the degree of work that has been undertaken prior to MACE meeting discussion. Some state that referral processes are becoming better understood and that the criteria are clear:

'We are confident that this is working. If not, cases come back for a further discussion'

'Pre-MACE is well attended, reflects key partners and agencies. Young people presented at meetings now have met formal criteria for MACE, pre-review and meetings return requests where information is missing, track and follow up'.

51. Others reflect on the variation in quality of work preceding a panel referral:

'The risk assessment process is long, and needs reviewing. It makes the referral process cumbersome'

'There are a lot of repeat cases, so how do we track that and how to we measure the impact of the action / interventions going in'.

52. The intention of the protocol is that the Operational MACE meeting should combine the discussion of children with the combination of what are sometimes referred to as 'strategic' issues (VOLT). The Operational MACE meeting is much more likely to be effective if there is a prior screening to ensure that only a small number of individual cases need to be discussed at the meeting and that disagreements and other operational and blockages are worked through via normal processes of challenge and escalation. In order to limit the number of young people discussed at the MACE, and to ensure that the correct children are discussed according to local criteria, most partnerships hold a pre-MACE meeting. One partnership did not hold a pre-MACE and identified this as a shortcoming because it was not possible to ensure that the Operational MACE meeting discussed the most concerning children. Without careful pre-MACE discussion, MACE meetings can become unwieldy and frustrating exacerbating difficulties over partner attendance and participation.
53. The format for pre-MACE discussion varies between partnerships. In some the MACE chair and coordinator work through a list of children based on an agreed referral form. In others there is a small meeting involving other members of the partnership, typically the local authority and police, sometimes with NHS and education sector involvement. In some partnerships there are exploitation specialists who periodically screen a cohort of children who have been identified as being at risk, together with newer referrals. One peer review described a system in which the cohort was kept under regular review with consultation being offered to the lead professional by a small team of exploitation specialists.
54. The number of specialist practitioners devoted exclusively to exploitation work varies widely between partnerships, as does practice as to whether these practitioners hold case responsibility. Partnerships acknowledged the potential for confusion over accountability if boundaries between advisors and lead professionals in front line services were not clear, though none of the peer review partnerships reported that this had been a problem in practice.
55. Discussion of the entire cohort of children viewed as being at risk of exploitation at a pre-MACE meeting is a lengthy undertaking, sometimes more time-consuming than the Operational MACE meeting itself. Few self-assessments offered detailed information about the number of children discussed at pre-MACE meetings, though some gave an indication of typical numbers. The lack of a consistent system to track referrals and outcomes on exploited children makes meaningful comparison impossible.

56. Some partnerships report that pre-MACE meetings are run successfully and form an important component of inter-agency working. Others state that securing attendance by agencies can be difficult. Police representatives are frustrated when different approaches are adopted by different boroughs in the same BCU. Some partnerships report that the pre-MACE meeting is also used to identify localities and themes that should be discussed at MACE. Offenders and disruption activity are much less commonly discussed. Reasons for this are considered in at a number of points in the report below.

Criteria for discussion at the Operational MACE

57. Self-assessments did not indicate what criteria the partnership used to decide whether an individual child should be discussed at the Operational MACE. In peer review discussions it was noted that the partnership thought the Operational MACE should talk about 'stuck cases'. The meaning of this term existed largely in the minds of exploitation leads, rather than being written down; however there was a high level of consistency as to what it meant in practice. These are high-risk cases where the plan has not reduced the risk and normal inter-agency discussions are not effective in providing an alternative course of action. However there are partnerships that take a very different approach, periodically reviewing all the young people identified as being at high or medium risk. This approach is in effect an additional layer of specialist oversight for exploited young people, rather than a discussion focused on a specific case management conflict or difficulty.

Tools for screening or risk assessment

58. A number of partnerships referred to locally developed referral forms, risk assessment or screening tools. We found no evidence that any referral form or screening tool had been shared or used in more than one borough (except where local authorities had formal links). However it is likely that a number derive from the MPS Form 87a. According to the operational protocol (page 22) this is used internally for escalation from BCU to specialist command, but it appears to have been adopted or adapted to serve other purposes. The introduction of standard risk assessment tools procedures across local authority areas would lead to greater consistency in practice.
59. While there are potential disadvantages in using any standardised template, the advantages appear to us to outweigh them. **The review recommends the adoption of a risk assessment checklist for individual children based on a format that can be used across agencies and can support referral, initial screening and risk assessment of children who may be at risk of exploitation. Any standard format should leave scope for professional judgment and exceptional circumstances.** Experience over many years in developing the DASH domestic abuse risk assessment format should be taken into account.²¹ **Formats for collating information on locations also do not need to vary between local authorities, or at least could have core, shared elements.**

3.4 The Operational MACE meeting

60. The operational protocol offers a template agenda for the Operational MACE meeting, making it the only component of the MACE arrangements proscribed in this way. Partnerships almost

²¹<https://safelives.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Dash%20risk%20checklist%20quick%20start%20guidance%20FINAL.pdf>

universally report that they try to implement an Operational MACE agenda using the VOLT mnemonic (Victim, Offender, Location, Theme) deriving from the protocol. Some partnerships use alternative but similar terms for their meetings or for VOLT, mainly because different terms have been used historically. A number of partnerships had consciously adopted the agenda and terminology proposed in the 4th edition of the protocol since its publication in March 2021. Their self-assessments and peer reviews were generally very positive, although there was often acknowledgement of difficulties in agency representation and engagement. A wide variety of factors are believed to influence agency attendance and these are discussed separately in Part 4 of this report.

61. Most of the tangible benefits of the MACE approach described by partnerships (see section 4.8 below) appear to arise from having an effective Operational MACE meeting. Three self-assessment returns stated that there was no monthly (or six weekly) Operational MACE. These responses reflect different issues. The first partnership was planning to introduce a meeting because the large gap (in timing and function) between its weekly panel (with an individual operational focus) and its 3-monthly strategic meeting made it very difficult to draw learning from individual cases into a strategy. The second was aware that its arrangements did not work well and was in the process of reviewing them. It appears that the third partnership relied exclusively on a two weekly panel to serve both operational and strategic functions. This local area was not part of the fuller peer review process, so no further information is available as to the effectiveness of this approach.
62. In one peer reviewed partnership the Operational MACE does not discuss individual young people. Its approach relies on normal escalation processes to resolve difficulties with individual cases, leaving the operational MACE to follow an entirely thematic agenda. While there is no objection in principle to this approach, it is likely that a more detailed discussion of the most difficult or typical individual cases can be beneficial in identifying wider learning. Experience in other partnerships shows that this can be done without confusing case accountability.
63. The most effective Operational MACE meetings had a strong pre-MACE filtering process in place and discussed a small number of cases. For example: at each meeting *'we take roughly 4 case referrals for full discussion, and possibly 3 reviews for update'*. In another partnership: *'we usually discuss about 7 cases per meeting from an overall cohort of about 50 young people'*. Although they aspire to taking this approach, many partnerships report that their Operational MACE meeting remains weighted heavily towards the discussion of individual young people, rather than the other components of the VOLT. As a result practice in relation to locations, themes and perpetrators / persons of interest was acknowledged to be weaker.
64. One self-assessment reported that *'we usually discuss between 6 and 9 sexual exploitation cases in the morning and 8-10 criminal exploitation referrals in the afternoon'*, leaving little time for more thematic discussion. Another acknowledged that we are *'not yet identifying and escalating themes'*. Another expressed the desire to *'reduce case management discussions and focus more on strategic responses to short, medium and longer-term themes'*. One Operational MACE split its agenda between two parts with the second half being thematic or featuring a presentation from an agency or focused on a locality. One peer review described its agenda as being split into three parts: 1) individual children, 2) thematic discussion and 3) young adults or those approaching the transition to adult services. This was an interim measure pending the creation of a separate panel for young adults which will have attendees in part drawn from agencies providing adult services.

65. Peer reviews reflected on the nature of the discussion that takes place at the Operational MACE. Participants recognise that work with exploited young people may be extremely challenging. While offering advice it not useful to engage in extensive criticism of professionals for what they have done or not done. Whilst they are unlikely to know the child, panel members need to be able to offer insight and advice, as well as possibly identifying the need for a specialist referral. Case-holding professionals may not be aware of the many initiatives and services being developed to support exploited young people (particularly in education and the voluntary sector) so the Operational MACE meeting can play a useful role in signposting.
66. Meetings are reported to be most effective when the agenda is circulated well in advance, clearly identifying individuals, locations and themes for discussion, so that participants can gather and evaluate information in advance and contribute more effectively. Agency representatives expressed frustration at having to postpone discussions or attend additional meetings when other participants had not prepared or brought information.
67. Peer reviews provided a number of examples of operations and thematic interventions arising from MACE discussions including: a coordinated intervention involving a number of police teams at a sports venue to counter the sexual exploitation of a group of girls; initiatives focused on substance abuse in a location; and measures to address anti-social behaviour focused on a large public shopping centre and car park. Another peer review described how thematic weaknesses in services provided by the CAMHS service had been identified and addressed following a number of case discussions.
68. **Considering the available evidence, the model of the Operational MACE set out in the protocol and the associated template agenda are the best current guide to an effective approach. It therefore seems logical to recommend that partnerships adopt it across London.** It is certain that some local authorities and safeguarding partnerships who (for a variety of reasons) wish to keep their own model will object to this. There is an obvious down-side to this. The perpetuation of a variety of approaches is frustrating for participating agencies and creates difficulties in cross borough working. It is not currently clear how the desire to adopt unique local approaches would be addressed. This should be a matter for the London Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive. Part 6 of this report is intended to help that discussion.

3.5 Strategic oversight through MACE

69. The operational protocol does not give detailed guidance on the way in which safeguarding partnerships should provide strategic oversight of work to safeguard exploited young people.²² Based on the information provided in the self-assessment returns, partnerships recognise that they need to be able to draw lessons from operational activity in order to shape service development, to ensure that 1) representatives of agencies at senior level understand the nature of exploitation in their locality and that 2) they are able to make informed decisions about the effectiveness of services in order to develop and improve them.
70. Partnerships do this in a variety of ways, and report different degrees of success. Many partnerships have identified a strategic group on exploitation which receives reports from the Operational MACE group. The role may be carried out by a group focused exclusively on

²² Under the heading 'Governance' the protocol says that '*The strategic MACE should be the strategic oversight panel and report directly to Child Exploitation Strategic Governance Board.*' (page 35). It is not clear whether these bodies were envisaged but never created, and whether they were to function at a local level or for the whole of London

exploitation, or as part of the function of a group dealing with a wider field of adolescent safeguarding, vulnerability harms and services. Variation reflects differences in structure and arrangements for reporting within the safeguarding partnership. These are inevitable. It is much more important to focus on the content and effectiveness of discussions on strategy, data, impact and collaboration, than to worry about specific local governance structures.

71. Most self-assessments did not provide detailed description of the strategic panel or group discussions. Those that did identified a number of activities including the following: discussing themes emerging from the operational activity, sharing briefings and reports from the MACE and discussions with external speakers. A number indicate that the strategic MACE group is vital in attempting to align work on exploitation with other borough and BCU strategies such as the violence reduction plan, plans to reduce violence to women and girls, and community safety plan.
72. Three self-assessment returns made no reference to a more senior meeting suggesting that they rely on the operational MACE group to set the direction of activity, perhaps reporting directly to the safeguarding partnership. A small number of self-assessments referred to annual reports on exploitation to the LSCP. These may have evolved from narrower annual reports on missing children or sexual exploitation.
73. A number of self-assessments and peer review discussions confirmed that the strategic group is not currently effective. As a result partners are not being briefed on important developments and professionals with knowledge of exploitation are not able to influence plans being made by other agencies and partnerships. One return noted that although some operational activity was very good, there was *'not much appetite or buy in at a strategic level for work against criminal exploitation'*. One noted that *'the right people were not around the table to progress any strategic conversation and actions'*; another acknowledged *'confusion about aims'*.
74. Although both the protocol and the feedback provided by self-assessments were limited in what they say, there is no doubt that the strategic oversight of activity to safeguard children from exploitation is critical. Without the full engagement of senior managers and leaders (both professional and those democratically elected) it is very unlikely that exploitation work will be given sufficient priority. To achieve this, data showing the extent and nature of exploitation needs to be presented and explained. This is a new and complex field of activity. Work to safeguard children from exploitation overlaps with many other areas of police, local authority, NHS and educational activity. It is an area to which many organisations at local, pan-London and national level believe they should contribute and are often willing to do so. Without strategic collaboration there is a risk of duplication and the uncoordinated development of initiatives and services.
75. **Local arrangements should ensure that there is proper strategic oversight of work on exploitation, with a regular review of objectives, data and outcomes. The form this takes should be for the local partnership to determine, but it must ensure that overlaps with related strategies and action plans are addressed. It must also enable the partnership to fulfil any data report agreed across London.**
76. **LASOB should consider how best to ensure that there is oversight of exploitation work across London, based on an agreed data set. This does not necessarily need to be undertaken by LASOB, but it should be identified as the responsibility of one body.**

3.6 Coordination and business support

77. An exploitation coordinator plays a key role in almost all local MACE arrangements. Job titles vary. The role of coordinator may be a dedicated post though sometimes the post holder has additional responsibilities. Most coordinators are local authority employees, sometimes being part of a small team focused on either exploitation or gangs and serious youth violence, or part of a wider adolescent team or service. One partnership self-assessment reported having no coordinator, indicating that business support officers would carry out these roles. Only a small number of self-assessments refer to the lack of business support.
78. The exploitation coordinator usually oversaw the preparation of the MACE meeting agenda and papers in advance, working alongside the panel chair(s) to decide which young people and which topics will be discussed and what information needs to be submitted. This is not always straightforward and the self-assessments indicate that discussions at Operational MACE are sometimes frustrated by gaps in information.
79. Preparation for MACE meetings sometimes involved a degree of professional screening and information gathering on individual cases, depending on the pre-MACE arrangements. The coordinator is usually a key support for the MACE chair(s).
80. The exploitation coordinator is also likely to have a role in maintaining a MACE tracker, monitoring progress and chasing actions. Trackers are discussed further in Section 5.2 below.
81. Depending on the status of the exploitation coordinator within the organisational structure, the role may involve liaison with more senior colleagues in the local authority and colleagues in partner agencies. The ability of the individuals to do this will vary.
82. According to the self-assessments, MACE administrative functions normally work well. Minutes and decisions are reported to be clear and circulated promptly, though some self-assessments referred to the need for a clear plan of actions from every meeting. Greater difficulties are said to arise from the lack of consistency in follow-through on decisions made, including delays in referral on to specialist services.

3.7 Arrangements for information sharing

83. The principles that underpin information sharing in relation to exploitation are well-established. The operational protocol contains model guidance for data protection, drawing on material from a number of government and professional guidance documents. The same principles inform the London Safeguarding Children Procedures and have recently been clarified and updated. A small number of self-assessments highlight specific local difficulties in implementation. Some relate to the lack of agreement to share information; others reflect the lack of engagement in MACE of a particular agency.
84. Partnerships report having information sharing agreements in place. Self-assessments largely confirm that information sharing arrangements supporting the referral and assessment of risk and the discussion of individual cases at Operational MACE work well. The risks and harms being discussed are generally understood to fall within statutory safeguarding arrangements. The most heavily agencies involved (MPS and local authorities) generally take a non-restrictive attitude to sharing information, preferring an open approach to the risk of harm happening because information has not been shared. Historically the same partners have also developed

community safety partnership information sharing agreements which tend to enable the free flow of information.

85. For reasons explored further in Sections 4.3 – 4.5 the NHS and schools are currently often less extensively involved in the formal MACE arrangements. Professionals in these services expect the reasons for sharing information and data to be explicit and health trusts expect up to date information sharing agreements and protocols to be in place. Difficulties may be experienced if this work has not been done, as one partnership highlighted:

‘There have been some delays to this due to needing to update Information Sharing Agreements and ensure that they are fit for purpose. This is often an area that impacts on meaningful joined up working, however we are making progress. There remain challenges in ensuring health and education data is fully included and is specific to children rather than wider family members.’

It may be that as the engagement of professionals in the NHS, schools and colleges increases, agreements will need to be updated and be more specific as to the information required and the reasons for sharing it.

86. A small number of self-assessments highlighted variation in practice between different local authority areas. For example, one partnership reported that there were long-standing difficulties in sharing information with a voluntary organisation based in an acute health setting, while other partnerships reported close working relationships and sharing of information with the same organisation. There is no good reason for this inconsistency.
87. If the recommendations of the [Independent Review of Children’s Social Care](#) are implemented, agreements may need to be adjusted to reflect revised statutory guidance. This may have some advantages. For example it would provide a clearer framework for the flagging and tracking of exploited children which would assist NHS providers.

3.8 Reported positive benefits of the MACE approach

88. All the peer review self assessments highlighted benefits of their MACE approach. Most commonly these referred to: 1) the impact on the management of risk in individual cases 2) the development of awareness of exploitation among staff at all levels and leaders in some agencies 3) better and more trusting relationships between the professionals most involved in the MACE meetings and 4) an improved ability to understand and respond to changing patterns of exploitation. The key factor is the development of a successful Operational MACE and the resulting development of a culture of trust and collaboration between partners. The following most commonly reported benefits of the MACE approach are listed as described. The peer reviews did not seek to test the accounts given.
89. Systematic measurement of impact and outcomes for young people and their families is considered in Section 5.2.
90. The most commonly cited benefits were in relation to individual case activity where the MACE approach was said to have:
- Created a mechanism that made possible problem-solving over individual cases and the escalation of concerns to senior managers
 - Promoted pathways for referral and problem solving that are understood by professionals, particularly social workers
 - Promoted better information sharing between partners in meetings on exploitation
 - Helped professionals recognise and respond to ‘high-risk’ cases

- Provided better oversight of resources and identified additional resources needed to implement safety plans
 - Improved practice in relation to young people who go missing
 - Enabled the police to undertake a number of operations based on intelligence compiled from MACE discussions.
91. Partnerships often reported that the MACE approach enabled the mapping of networks around young people and those exploiting them, either in the preparation for a MACE discussion, or as a task arising from the MACE meeting. However the consistency with which this is done and its usefulness varied greatly. Many partnerships recognised current shortcomings, typically:
‘in some cases the blockages are not resolved, following escalation. (We) need to look at reasons for this - for example is the agency present in the meeting, are they at the right level to make decisions on behalf of their service, do they understand their safeguarding responsibilities, does their protocol / legislation prevent them supporting the action identified’?
92. A number of partnerships pointed to changes in the culture of inter-agency working, and improvements in training and professional development, stating for example that the MACE approach:
- Helped create trusting relationships between a small set of professionals who regularly work together on the topic of exploitation
 - Promoted a culture where there is a focus and development of expertise on exploitation
 - Enabled the development of briefings on exploitation for front line professionals
 - Led to the development of training and information sharing on gangs and exploitation, hotspots (for criminal activity) and referral pathways for young people
 - Led to the development of training on the impact of serious incidents in staff, young people and their peers and the wider community
 - Improved the dissemination of intelligence updates to frontline workers to inform their assessments and intervention.

PART 4 PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS TO MACE ARRANGEMENTS

93. This section of the report considers the contribution of the statutory services involved in work to safeguard young people from exploitation. The main focus is on the involvement of the NHS, the MPS and the education sector. Many partnerships struggle with this:
‘There are clearly identified single points of contact from a wide range of agencies, however attendance at meetings is not always prioritised. Increased demand on services does impact on consistency of attendance and despite raising this there has not been significant improvement’
The role of the voluntary sector in MACE arrangements is explored only briefly, but urgently needs to be developed, as part of work to promote greater overall consistency.

4.1 Local authority social care services

94. Local MACE arrangements are coordinated through local authority social care professionals, sometimes with strong support from the MPS. The commitment of managers in social care to this work is consistently high and many local authorities have made a strong financial commitment, including the appointment of exploitation coordinators and specialist staff. Only one self-assessment cited several recent changes in local authority social care management as a factor causing instability. It has not been possible to establish how much detailed attention

social care leaders give to MACE arrangements. **Action will be required of local authorities as a result of other recommendations in this report, but there are no specific recommendations for local authorities.**

4.2 Metropolitan Police Service (MPS)

Introduction

95. The aspiration to achieve consistency in MACE arrangements has been championed by the MPS and the development of the operational protocol has been led by senior officers, mainly those in central or specialist roles. Despite this, self-assessments and peer review meetings highlighted substantial local variation in the police contribution to MACE arrangements. This is a current challenge for a number of partnerships, with some also reporting it as a long-standing problem. Key areas are: attendance at meetings, chairing of meetings by police officers and the discussion of police-led activity to disrupt exploitation at multi-agency MACE meetings.
96. Self-assessments and peer reviews also confirmed that many police officers show a strong commitment to the MACE, attending and sharing responsibility for the leadership of local meetings. The project team heard many examples of close collaborative working, with police officers who have a strong awareness of the perspectives of the local authority and other partners. However models of police work on exploitation varied, with some BCUs able to track and support a cohort of young people identified as being at risk of exploitation while other BCUs were reported to struggle to support smaller numbers. These differences are difficult to understand and would benefit from closer internal examination by the MPS.
97. The evaluation considers these topics at length because the role of the police in work to safeguard children from exploitation is critical. The negatives described can quickly become a source of frustration, absorbing considerable managerial time and energy. Difficulties identified in peer reviews reflected the following features of police involvement in the work, some linked to current police structures and organisational arrangements:
- The range of police teams officers now involved in multi-agency safeguarding work and the Basic Command Unit structure
 - Turnover of officers in management roles at key ranks
 - Challenges arising from the reduced capacity.
98. Notwithstanding some very detailed discussions that have taken place within the project team, it is impossible to provide a comprehensive picture. **The MPS should do further work internally to understand why certain approaches exist, and how some BCUs have moved towards resolving them.**
99. The extent to which work to disrupt exploitation was discussed in MACE meetings varied greatly. This is considered separately (see Section 5.1). The use made of police data to understand patterns of exploitation is also evaluated as part of the wider discussion on data (see Section 5.2).

The range of police responsibilities and the BCU structure

100. A number of partnerships reported difficulties in engaging all relevant sections of the BCU, or that working relationships and engagement were better with some police teams than others; however, no consistent pattern emerged. For example:

'There is a large cohort of children being discussed at (MACE) but fewer of these are open to Police Exploitation Teams, this needs to be monitored to ensure children receive the right police response at the right time.

There is '... a lot of frustration around the disconnect between criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation (which sit in different strands of the police) and a perceived lack of join up between them when it comes to diversion, enforcement'.

101. These difficulties are probably not surprising, given the very large number of police teams and officers whose work might now be considered to fall within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. In order to understand why it is proving difficult for the police to make a consistent contribution to multi-agency exploitation arrangements, it is useful to review the range of police responsibilities and how they sit within BCU structures.
102. The MPS organises its local police services in 12 Basic Command Units (BCUs) which replaced Borough Operational Command Units in 2018-19. BCUs cover 2, 3 and in one case 4 local authority areas. BCU boundaries follow borough boundaries so each borough falls within a single BCU. Each BCU is then organised in four sections: Local Investigations, Neighbourhoods, Response, and Public Protection, along with additional administrative and office functions.²³ Many officers acknowledge that the creation of BCUs was in part a response to the need to work within reduced budgets.
103. Historically the police safeguarding remit focused on child abuse investigation and domestic abuse. The inclusion of exploitation as a component of children's safeguarding has led to the engagement of a far larger number of police officers in safeguarding activity that relies on the participation of partner agencies. Neighbourhood policing has always had a considerable overlap with local authority community safety activity which is now also viewed as an area that should recognise its impact on the safeguarding of children.
104. The information in Table 3 illustrates this activity and where it sits within the BCU structure. This is based on the arrangement of functions within one BCU and there is known to be variation between BCUs. These responsibilities and structures come together at the level of BCU Chief Superintendent, but it has been recognised that BCU Chief Superintendents often delegate effective responsibility for safeguarding arrangements and multi-agency liaison to the Detective Superintendent with responsibility for public protection.²⁴
105. In addition, the MPS undertakes modern slavery and large scale operations against organised crime through Central Specialist Operations, covering the whole of London. While the central teams have appointed officers to liaise with BCUs and they have attended some MACE meetings, it is difficult for central teams to sustain close relationships with teams working on exploitation across all BCUs.

²³ The information here is drawn from publicly accessible MPS documents and information on local structures provided through self-assessment responses. Local models sometimes vary slightly from the approach originally set out in the One MET 2020 briefings and the MPS 2020-23 Business Plan, however the fundamental points made in the following paragraphs remain relevant.

²⁴ This is an example of an approach widely reported. See for example the Alan Woods review of local child safeguarding partnership arrangements https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/987928/Wood_Review_of_multi-agency_safeguarding_arrangements_2021.pdf

Table 3 – allocation of policing responsibilities with a multi-agency child safeguarding component in one BCU

BCU Function	Police Teams with a safeguarding remit
Local investigations	Youth Offending Team; CID investigation; Gangs Violence and Matrix; Offender Management; Violence Suppression; Data Sharing Agreements
Neighbourhood	Safer Neighbourhoods Teams and Tasking; Town Centre Teams; Partnerships (Schools, Anti-Social Behaviour, Schools, Violence Against Women and Girls, Youth Referral Pathways)
Response	Stop and Search; Response Teams
Public protection	Sapphire (serious sexual offences); Child Abuse Investigation Teams; MASH, Sexual exploitation; Safeguarding Hub; Adult Safeguarding

106. Historically, engagement with multi-agency safeguarding partners in local policing fell within the remit of the senior officer with responsibility for safeguarding / public protection. Coinciding with the creation of the BCU, the broadening of safeguarding responsibilities means that multi-agency liaison through bodies such as MACE is required of a much larger number of senior officers and their services. In the structure illustrated in Table 3, discussions about four potentially important areas of policing (gangs or youth offending, safer schools, use of stop and search, and child abuse investigation) would require engagement with four different parts of the BCU. It is therefore not surprising that liaison with some police teams is more successful, that it can be difficult to secure full representation and engagement at MACE and other partnership meetings, and that strategic thinking across the full range of safeguarding activities is hard to achieve.
107. Peer reviews confirm, not surprisingly, that some local partnerships navigate these obstacle more successfully than others. A variety of solutions have been attempted, including both developing mechanisms for closer liaison and merger of functions within the BCU (for example consideration of a joint police exploitation team) and widening police representation at multi-agency meetings. Securing full police representation at strategy meetings (i.e. attendance from the MPS and in particular securing information from the range of MPS teams who had been involved with the young person) was reported to be a difficulty in a number of authorities. All these issues must be affected by the level of resourcing available and the experience and competence of officers.
- 108. The review is not in a position to recommend particular solutions to the MPS, however we would strongly suggest that the MPS considers the merger of teams or the reallocation of teams within BCU structures in order to improve the police contribution to multi-agency exploitation work. It is reasonable to expect there to be greater consistency across the MPS BCUs.**

Rapid turnover of senior police officers and the chairing of multi-agency meetings

109. The most commonly reported concern about the MPS involvement in MACE meetings is the rapid turnover of police officers at the Detective Superintendent (Det Sup) and Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) ranks. This is widely recognised as a problem, including by MPS representatives. It is not uncommon to hear that local authority exploitation leads have worked over a period of 2-3 years with five or six superintendents and DCIs. Lack of continuity makes it more difficult for police officers to develop their work or engage consistently in multi-agency work. Officers at these ranks understandably need to spend time familiarising themselves with what may be a new role and area of work and it is frustrating for everyone involved if they are moved to another post as they begin to build specialist knowledge and establish relationships with partners. The rapid turnover of officers can leave key parts of the MPS with little organisational memory about the safeguarding of children. All of these problems are made even more significant by the expectation that senior police officers will chair or attend meetings and influence practice in two or three safeguarding partnerships.
110. The most serious concern for MACE arrangements is that the turnover of officers undermines the ability of the MPS to provide chairs of sufficient seniority and experience to chair MACE meetings, in line with the operational protocol. The review is aware of many accounts of MACE meetings at which the police officer chairing or co-chairing the meeting plays only a limited role because he or she has never attended a MACE meeting before. Two or three months later, when the next cycle of meetings is held, that officer may have become sufficiently familiar with their work to lead the meeting, but in the worst case scenario he or she will have left their post to be replaced by the next incumbent.
111. There are of course exceptions. Many police officers have made it a point of principle that they will quickly 'get up to speed' when appointed, and are able to do so because they bring relevant experience from previous postings. Peer reviews showed that great reliance is sometimes placed on more junior officers (typically Detective Sergeants and Inspectors), who have stayed in post for longer, or have worked in safeguarding roles for many years, who attend or chair key MACE meetings. Although some of these boroughs believe that this is an effective solution, there are disadvantages. Despite building up expertise and trust with partner agencies, more junior officers are less likely to develop connections and influence across the BCU and with leaders in partner agencies. They are likely to find it harder to influence either BCU priorities or broader partnership thinking.
112. Problems of rapid officer turnover and chairing have been addressed in a number of ways by partnerships and exploitation specialists in the local authority. This has included arranging alternating police chairs for sequential meetings, or accepting that the meeting will be chaired by the local authority representative with a less senior police officer in attendance. These tend to be at best short-term fixes, with considerable disadvantages. There may be even less continuity in attendance between meetings, or the focus of discussion may shift from one meeting to the next depending on who is chairing the meeting. These difficulties need to be understood, evaluated and solved by the MPS at BCU level, drawing on a set of principles agreed by MPS leaders with strategic responsibility for safeguarding. Local authority exploitation leads should not be expected to keep finding short term fixes to a problem the origins of which are located within a single agency. The MPS will need to find a balance between the development of the best safeguarding arrangements and a wider concern to maintain the flexibility of staffing at the Superintendent and DCI ranks.

113. **Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships need to ensure that the BCU Chief Superintendent understands the difficulty created by the rapid turnover of DCIs and Detective Superintendents in public protection, and addresses the problem. The review makes a recommendation on this.**

4.3 NHS, school and education service involvement – common themes

Introduction and themes common to the NHS and the education sector

114. Self-assessments described wide variation in the contribution made by the NHS and education sectors to the local MACE arrangements, with some shared questions emerging:
- What are the key local services involved in work to combat exploitation?
 - What contribution can they make to the MACE arrangements?
 - How should these sectors be represented at the range of meetings that make up the MACE approach in any locality?
 - How can a more consistent approach be agreed and implemented across London?
115. Some partnerships take the view that they have an effective MACE, though there seemed to be no significant health or education sector contribution. Unlike the MPS and the local authority, health and education contributions may not have been seen as essential because the focus of the MACE is largely on the current management of high-risk individuals.
116. Although self-assessments and peer reviews identified NHS and education representatives working hard to make a contribution to the MACE arrangements, neither the NHS nor the education sector had developed overall expectations about how to contribute to the MACE, beyond providing information on individual young people identified as being at risk. As a result opportunities are being missed. For example, the potential to gather and analyse information about a cluster of health events to inform understanding of a trend in exploitation or shape a priority is not being realised. It is recognised that the development of the MACE approach has coincided with the Covid pandemic and significant NHS reorganisation, both of which are observed to have disrupted health service participation in safeguarding and exploitation activity. Sections 4.4 – 4.5 below consider in more detail what a more comprehensive role of education and NHS services might look like and whether mechanisms exist within those sectors that would enable greater consistency to be achieved.
117. The operational protocol highlights the important role of health services (including mental health) in the identification, referral and management of child exploitation. Page 11 of the protocol suggests MACE panels should be attended by ‘health exploitation leads’, and that ‘health’ should have oversight of the most high risk cases. There is no indication as to who the exploitation lead might be (should he or she actually exist). Roles of commissioners, providers, and safeguarding specialists are not considered, suggesting the need for a more detailed understanding of the NHS. Potentially NHS structures should offer the opportunity for a high degree of influence to ensure a consistent cross-London focus in MACE and on the topic of exploitation more widely. It is not unreasonable to expect agreement on minimum standards of participation and engagement from NHS bodies.
118. Statutory guidance for safeguarding in schools recognises that children at risk of exploitation may need early help or safeguarding, includes relevant definitions (extra-familial harm, criminal and sexual exploitation) and gives detailed descriptions of signs and symptoms of exploitations. Guidance offers links to other government documents and research but gives no indication of

how the sector might define its role beyond the responsibilities of the Designated Safeguarding Lead in an individual school or education setting.²⁵ Peer reviews showed MACE education representatives working hard on individual cases but we did not see leaders or senior managers with a greater oversight of education bringing wider issues to MACE meetings. Individually schools do much to combat knife crime and exploitation, but it is unusual for wider initiatives to be launched in schools and colleges that build on the detailed understanding that the leaders of these institutions often have of the communities in which they are based.

119. The operational protocol mentions the role of the education sector in maintaining children in education, prevention of harm, responding to radicalisation and PHSE. Exclusion is noted as a risk factor. As with the NHS, the protocol notes that a designated education sector exploitation lead is expected to attend the MACE, but it does not say who this should be. There is no evidence that further work has subsequently been undertaken on this. Given the highly fragmented nature of the education sector, it is not immediately clear where the responsibility for this would fall.

4.4 NHS

120. A fully developed NHS role in MACE arrangements would include the following:
 - Sharing information about individuals in relevant forums in order to contribute to the understanding of the local exploitation risk
 - Ensuring that the outcomes of discussions at MACE about individuals are shared with involved health professionals
 - Participating in the evaluation of risk, planning responses and unblocking problems on cases
 - Using NHS data and more subjective information on service trends to contribute to the overall understanding of exploitation
 - Identifying the need for NHS or multi-agency service development (which might include training of staff, service design and the development of care pathways, development or revision of procedures or practice guidance)
 - Arguing the case for priority to be given to work to combat exploitation within the NHS and the multi-agency partnership
121. Health services can only contribute to MACE if information about young people available within the NHS can be identified and brought together in an efficient way. Although it may have happened in some localities, the NHS has not systematically mapped the services involved in work with young people who are at risk of exploitation. As a result the contribution to MACE arrangements is variable. As with the MPS, NHS provider trust responsibilities do not coincide with local authority boundaries. **Systematic local mapping of NHS services involved in work with young people who are at risk of exploitation should be a priority. Once this is done it will be easier for the NHS to contribute fully to MACE arrangements. Mapping the service in this way will enable the targeting of staff training and development.**
122. The NHS also needs to decide which professionals are best placed to gather and provide information on individual young people. It should develop approaches that enable health providers to spot clusters of cases, trends in exploitation and themes. Once a service has been identified as being key to the MACE arrangements, health managers should take advice from

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2>

named safeguarding staff as to how relevant data from their service can be obtained and presented.

123. Peer reviews highlighted some common practical challenges for the NHS in contributing to MACE discussions. For example, how many young people is it possible to discuss in a pre-MACE while ensuring that the relevant health information can be collated and presented? How is all the relevant information held by an individual health trust collated? If similar services (such as substance misuse and sexual health) are being provided by different trusts in the same geographical area, is the MACE receiving all the relevant information? Who has access to the relevant health information systems and understands what information might be relevant? Can collation of this information be undertaken by an administrator? Has the trust agreed to share the relevant information? Is there a system to identify the young person's GP and obtain information? Some partnerships have solved some of these problems.
124. The peer review was made aware of one local authority area in which the public health service coordinated the contribution to MACE. More often the role is played by named and designated professionals, though this varies greatly from one partnership area to another. **Senior local NHS managers and safeguarding specialists, such as the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding, should have oversight of the participation in MACE arrangements across local health providers. Local arrangements will vary according to the make-up of the local health economy, but minimum standards should apply across London. There is a strong case for giving one leader in the local NHS responsibility for overseeing the arrangements and solving problems as they arise. It is not clear from the peer reviews who that should be because Integrated Care System arrangements are not yet fully established.**
125. The functions set out above (Section 120 above) can only be satisfied through full NHS participation in MACE forums at which different issues (risk identification, escalation and problem solving, operational and strategic) are addressed. NHS professionals can only participate fully in MACE arrangements if the purpose of each meeting is understood and the agenda prepared makes clear what is required. Experience indicates that this is not always the case. NHS representatives, MACE chairs and exploitation coordinators need to resolve these difficulties.

NHS flagging and tracking of young people who are at risk

126. One function of health attendance at pre-MACE or operational MACE meetings (depending on local arrangements) is the sharing of feedback and plans with health providers. Discussion with health professionals confirms that patient records are sometimes flagged because of exploitation, but that practice is inconsistent. In part this is due to the lack of a clear framework of statutory guidance leading to differences in local practice as to the status of young people deemed to be at risk, however difficulties also arise within the NHS which leave decisions on this to local discretion. This isn't a responsibility of the MACE *per se*, but it may limit the NHS contribution to MACE.
127. The following barriers have been identified:
- There is no single flag or marker for exploitation (or adolescent safeguarding risk) across the NHS. The flagging of children who are subject to a child protection plan is likely to be much less effective for children at risk of exploitation because they are currently less likely to be the subject of a child protection plan
 - Many health providers are required to flag records manually

- Some health providers use multiple systems which do not share information automatically, so multiple records need to be flagged in order to ensure comprehensive coverage
 - There are currently no comprehensive systems (either from the MACE or within the NHS) note changes in status (such as when a child moves) or to remove flags. This makes some health trusts wary about applying flags in the first place because they fear that the information will soon become unreliable.
128. The creation of a Child Community Safety Plan (see Part 2 of the report) for those children deemed to be at risk of significant harm would address some of these difficulties, though not those stemming from NHS systems and practices. In the absence of further agreement, the status of other exploited children (subject to YOS orders, child in need plans or early help arrangements) will still not be clear and they might not be flagged.

4.5 Schools and education services

129. Education services with significant roles in work to combat exploitation include the following: schools and academy trusts, Pupil Referral Units (PRUs), the school partnerships which exist in some boroughs, FE colleges, and local authority education services. Neither national statutory guidance nor the operational protocol identifies who in the sector has role of leading or coordinating work on exploitation. The diversity of educational provision and current accountability structures make it hard (perhaps impossible) to identify a single education representative able to speak on behalf of the sector.
130. The functions served by education services representation in the MACE should be similar to those of the NHS, and include:
- Sharing information about individuals in order to contribute to the understanding of risk
 - Ensuring that schools and others receive updates from MACE discussions about individuals
 - Participating in the evaluation of risk, planning responses and unblocking problems on cases
 - Presenting and evaluating information on the factors within the education sector that in any given locality are contributing to risks of exploitation, including for example differences in rates of school attendance and exclusion, or clusters of incidents taking place in or near schools and colleges
 - identifying action within the education sector which will improve responses to exploitation.
131. Input of education services in MACE discussions is usually limited to the first two of these. MACE meetings largely focus on the most high-risk individual victims, many of whom are no longer engaged in mainstream education. Educational actions often concern the reintegration of the young person in some form of education with the role of the education representative being to assist in the development of a plan and to persuade other professionals that even minimal engagement can be vital. Wider issues (such as strategies to influence rates of attendance and exclusion) will always be actively discussed in other local authority or school partnership forums. However these discussions may not take full account of child exploitation. This is likely to lead to a lack of joined-up activity and strategic thinking on the role of schools and other education services in relation to exploitation.
132. Some MACEs are well served by a strongly-motivated individual representing one educational function or provider such as special educational needs or behaviour support, the main pupil referral unit, or a school or educational partnership. Some local authorities have retained a central education welfare or education safeguarding advisory function which may provide a representative. Typically representatives bring information about a young person's school

status and educational plans, feeding back updates to the education provider. A number of self-assessments highlight the lack of representation on SEND. For example: *‘SEND involvement (in the MACE) is being actively explored due to an apparent increase in young people ... who have an EHCP and/or ASD diagnosis/suspicion’*. This is a significant gap.

133. Ideally education sector input to MACE arrangements should include information on the following themes:
 - Recognition of vulnerability and the prevention of exploitation
 - Transition of pupils to secondary school
 - Curriculum initiatives on knife crime and sexually harmful behaviours
 - Schools and colleges as contexts within / around which exploitation can occur
 - Reduction of risk factors
 - Improving school attendance
 - Exclusion and alternative provision
 - SEND
 - The re-engagement of young people who are out of school (including those returning to the community from custody)
 - Specific issues facing the local FE college.
134. Most of these topics concern much earlier points in the child’s journey than the current MACE focus on high-risk exploitation. They should be considered as part of integrated arrangements to protect children, of which the MACE is only one part. MACE needs to be able to influence discussion of these topics in other forums in whatever ways seem relevant to the local context (e.g. through the presentation of case studies and comparative data).
135. There is scope for the education sector to play a greater role in work to combat wider areas of exploitation. By their very nature, schools and colleges lend themselves to contextual approaches because many head teachers and college leaders have a sense of their school as a community, in a location, which has a history that outlasts the involvement of cohorts of pupils and individual members of staff. Exploitation often takes place in or around schools and colleges, which are also sometimes the scene of violent conflicts between young people. FE colleges often make elaborate arrangements to safeguard their students, but do not always have a close engagement with the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. There are challenges. Head teachers rarely have the time to attend meetings such as MACE and understandably do not like to speak for other schools and colleges. Mechanisms need to be developed that will unlock this potential. Schools need to be considered as part of the solution. In the absence of an agreed approach from within the sector, this is an issue that Directors of Children’s Services should address.
136. **LASOB should consider how the work already carried out on the role of schools in the board and through the Tackling Child Exploitation project could support the changes suggested. Directors of Children’s Services should be asked to ensure that their MACE arrangements include adequate senior education sector management and leadership representation.**

4.6 The voluntary sector

137. Voluntary sector organisations play a significant role in services for young people at risk of exploitation. Provision is varied, from large organisations with a national or pan-London remit, to small local charities and youth services who may employ only a handful of staff and volunteers. Some voluntary organisations have been influential in shaping policy and practice

on child exploitation. The role of the voluntary sector varies from one local authority area to another and across time, depending on the services commissioned. Many organisations work with children who are considered to be at a high level of risk as part of an agreed service strategy working closely with statutory services. Others work more independently with services receiving referrals from statutory agencies as well as self-referrals from young people and their families.

138. MACE self-assessments provided very little information about voluntary sector attendance and engagement in the MACE arrangements, though a number noted that it was an area that needed to be developed. One large voluntary organisation that works with children across London told the review that it was given little information about local MACE arrangements and often not invited to discussions about young people with whom its staff were working. Whether this would also be typical of local organisations commissioned specifically in one local authority area is not clear, though it is a significant finding in its own right.
139. If there is a lack of clarity about the purpose of meetings within the MACE arrangements, or the meetings are not effective, the engagement of voluntary organisations is likely to suffer most from this, since they are likely to be on the margin of discussions about MACE approach. Responsibility sits with the local partnership and chairs of MACE meetings to define the purpose of meetings clearly and the role that voluntary organisations should play in MACE meetings, depending on their role in local service provision. **The review makes a recommendation in relation to this.**

PART 5 CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

5.1 Work to disrupt exploitation and criminality

140. MACE discussion about activity to disrupt exploitation varies between local authority areas and according to the type of exploitation. One self-assessment return said that police disruption activity is *'discussed regularly at MACE'*, and another noted that intelligence collated at the MACE is *'often a driver for identifying locations for police activity'*. Some forms of criminality (such as the cuckooing of the home of a vulnerable person by criminals in order to supply drugs in the surrounding locality) are relatively commonplace and associated methods of disruption are well-established. There are also established interventions, such as Operation Makesafe, that aim to involve the local business community in reducing exploitation.²⁶ Disruption work on these themes is likely to be part of the established pattern of local police activity, though that does not necessarily mean that it is planned with other agencies.
141. A number of MACE self-assessments identified disruption of criminality as an area in which the need for improvement was identified, including the following:
- 'Intelligence gathering in relation to suspects/adults of interest – more information is required about what interventions are being put in place for them'*
- Better understanding of disruption tactics in relation to adult offenders to be shared with MACE partners.*
- There is a great emphasis on safeguarding and safety planning presently. The panel could benefit from understanding what disruption techniques and strategies are available in order for more effective disruption plans.*

²⁶ <https://www.met.police.uk/police-forces/metropolitan-police/areas/about-us/about-the-met/campaigns/operation-makesafe/>

To address these concerns one partnership had suggested that ‘the police ... (should have) a standing update on the agenda so they can share relevant information about exploitation and disruption with wider partners present as MACE’.

142. The turnover of BCU officers chairing and attending MACE (see Section 4.2) makes it more difficult for disruption activity to be discussed at MACE, not least because the sharing of information is easier if there are established and trusting relationships. Sometimes the outcomes of police-led disruption activity are reported to MACE after the activity has happened, rather than being considered in advance as a collectively-owned intervention that forms part of a larger strategy. Operations against modern slavery and county lines are also often initiated by the MPS Central Specialist Crime Directorate which has more limited links to local MACE meetings.
143. Although the operational protocol contains a lengthy appendix with a very detailed account of the civil and criminal legal measures that support disruption activity,²⁷ the application of this procedural information may not be widely understood by other agencies in MACE meetings. MACE panel members do not always identify how their agency might contribute to disruption activity. Anecdotally, there is less coordinated disruption activity in relation to criminal exploitation than child sexual exploitation, though there is no data to confirm this. This would fit the previously reported national picture.²⁸
144. The lack of MACE activity devoted to disruption may reflect a degree of ambivalence on the part of some professionals in relation to the disruption of criminal exploitation, where many young people graduate from being exploited to being actively involved in harming other young people, or fall within both roles at the same time. This is intrinsic to the nature of criminal exploitation in a way that is not the case with child sexual exploitation (though it of course occurs). This issue has been explored to only a very limited degree in the academic research literature. There may be a need to recognise that the agencies view this in different ways, reflecting different belief systems and organisational cultures. Avoiding frank discussion of such differences is likely to hold back disruption work.
- 145. The MPS and safeguarding partnerships should consider how to promote the role of all agencies in disruption activity and discussion of this topic within the MACE arrangements.**

²⁷ Operational Protocol (2021) Appendix H – Tactical options and legislation (pages 64-74)

²⁸ The Child Safeguarding Practice Review (2020) It was Hard to Escape, recommended that ‘more priority should be given to disrupting perpetrator activity’, noting that at local level ‘there was little information or working knowledge among safeguarding partnerships of what intervention strategies were being taken against the perpetrators of criminal exploitation. This is a marked contrast with the dual approach taken to children who are sexually exploited (i.e. to both help the victims and disrupt the activity of the perpetrators).’

5.2 The collection and evaluation of data to help measure outcomes, impact and effectiveness

Introduction

146. Partnerships were asked to describe how they used data or performance measures to identify and measure the impact of their MACE arrangements. The 4th edition of the protocol has a brief section headed 'Measurement of MACE Success' setting out the aspiration for the development of a MACE or exploitation dataset. However it provides no specific guidance as to the contents of the dataset, who should be responsible for developing it, or which agencies should contribute data.²⁹
147. The absence of a statutory framework (see Part 2 of this report) means that there is no requirement for standardised collection of data on child exploitation. As a result there is no consistency, with decisions being made on this at local authority or partnership level. Individual agencies are required to collate data internally, such as crime statistics and factors identified in social care assessment that may be linked to exploitation. Until a pan-London or national dataset is agreed, effort seems likely to go into local initiatives which will perpetuate significant variation.
148. The Tackling Child Exploitation project has produced a number of very useful papers exploring the use of data.³⁰ It appears that the published work took place outside London. The implementation of the recommendations of the recent independent review of children's social care in relation to extra-familial harm would create requirements for the more consistent collection of data. If these are similar to existing requirements for child protection activity, data collection and performance indicators are likely to focus on the measurement of activity and process, rather than impact.

Potential benefits of holding and evaluating data

149. There is the potential to make better use of data to provide a greater understanding of a number of aspects of exploitation, including the following:
- The incidence and prevalence of exploitation and other adolescent safeguarding harms
 - The characteristics of the cohort of young people considered to be at risk of exploitation
 - Individual, family and wider environmental and societal risk factors associated with exploitation
 - Activity from services responding to exploitation including contacts, referrals, assessments, allocations and plans in place (for social care), reported crimes, investigations and outcomes (for the MPS)
 - Outcomes of these activities to include both
 - Quantifying the range of meetings held and decisions made about children
 - Measures of wellbeing and perceived reduction in risk to individuals (real change for children)

²⁹ The protocol says that 'By adopting the changes detailed in this document, the strategic meeting will be able to effectively demonstrate the success of its involvement and investment in combatting child exploitation through the collection of key information and intelligence, it will ensure there is a consistent data set collected that will inform both a local and a London-wide problem profile. This will provide the Strategic Governance Board with a much more accurate picture of London child exploitation picture.' Operational Protocol (pages 35-36) It is also not clear what the Strategic Governance Board referred to is or who should be responsible for convening it.

³⁰ <https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/learning-and-reflections/programme-themes/data/>

- Views of young people and their families
- Tracking the outcomes of activity of the MACE including impact on individuals discussed
- Use of data to map patterns of incidents and networks
- Use of data to map risk factors and contextual information, including the possible use of this information to target interventions.

This section of the report will consider the evidence on local progress from self-assessments and peer review meetings.

The use of data to describe the problem of exploitation, activity undertaken and impact

150. With very few exceptions, partnerships reported that they were trying to develop approaches to some of these potential uses of data. These efforts were being made in individual partnerships and the review saw no evidence of successful approaches being shared, except where local authorities had formal links.
151. A number of self-assessment reported progress in the creation of a database and reporting system:
 - *MACE has been developing a dashboard which will pull together a range of information from social care, early help, health services, Police, and education to provide a comprehensive real time picture of vulnerability, need, risk and location.*
 - *Our dashboard provides an overview of everyone featured on the (MACE) agenda, themes and trends. This provides an individual meeting view and a strategic view consisting of data from every panel. This dashboard also allows for sharing of key themes with the strategic board*
 - *... our newly launched dashboard that provides a live, interactive, child-level 'single view' of a range of important risks for adolescents. This is routinely used ...to identify and understand risks*

Without a more detailed examination, it is not possible to evaluate how these initiatives are contributing to local activity and service planning.

152. A larger number of MACE self-assessments confirmed that the partnership is struggling to produce meaningful data or evaluate it. For example:
 - *'we lack a MACE spreadsheet or database to monitor child referrals, outcomes and trends to be updated at every MACE panel'*
 - *A 'MACE panel database could be used (added emphasis) to monitor the lifespan of a young person open to MACE, including the risk journey, interventions used, and the impact of MACE panel on risk and outcomes'*
 - *'information regarding themes / locations etc is stored individually on children's case files. It would be helpful to create a document after each panel highlighting themes and locations that have arisen from MACE that month to share across directorates within the council'.*
 - Another return identifies the need for *'MACE outcomes to be analysed and measurable in an easily accessible format'*, while another wants *'data from the panel to be generated and analysed to contribute to the local child exploitation problem profile'.*

For a new field of activity with no framework of statutory guidance, this is not surprising. Anyone who has tried to bring together and understand data on exploitation at a local level will know that it can be an immensely frustrating experience. **To avoid further duplication of activity it is important that those partnerships who believe they have useful systems are encouraged to**

share information about them and that there is rapid agreement on the contents of a pan-London dataset.

153. The proposal in the Independent Review of Children's Social Care to create a Child Community Safety Plan will encourage (and then inevitably require) consistent administrative data to be held on children deemed to be at risk because of exploitation (such as the number of referrals, assessments, plans and the length of time taken to complete steps in an agreed pathway) bringing data collection to the level currently available for intra-familial harm.
154. Even as this happens, collection and analysis of data is likely to remain challenging because exploitation is a concept that does not map neatly onto the established activities of individual agencies or match with data that services are required to hold. For example child criminal exploitation spans a variety of criminal offences as well as activities that are not defined as criminal. Different forms of exploitation span the categories used in social care to classify the factors identified in the assessment of children in need.³¹
155. Providing a reasonably accurate estimate of the total number of children and young people who are presenting with possible signs of exploitation presents difficulties. Responses to exploitation involve services in many agencies. Exploited young people present in different ways to a range of teams and services, often to more than one at the same time. As a result combining agency information about exploited children will lead to double counting unless entries about the same child are matched. This requires the sharing of data with identifying information. This is easier to achieve within local authorities (and sometimes with the police) than with the NHS, which is culturally more cautious about sharing identifiable data unless professionals are convinced that it is a necessary and proportionate approach.

Which agencies currently contribute data to the MACE?

Social care and MPS data

156. In partnerships where the MACE has a dataset, the majority of information is drawn from sources linked to the local authority (social care, youth offending service and early help). Typically this will include information on the number of referrals received and assessments completed in which exploitation has been identified as a risk factor. However some social care databases proved to be very inflexible, or upgrades had not been commissioned, as a result of which difficulties were noted in recording outcomes linked to exploitation in a way which could be counted. For some authorities this included missing episodes and referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), making it impossible to report to the safeguarding partnership on these topics without manual counting of incidents.
157. Self-assessments report that the availability of data on police activity for the MACE varies greatly. Police data can provide a detailed picture of reported offences in order to identify locations and times when specific offences are most commonly committed and to help build a composite profile of victims and suspected offenders. Often this builds on work that has been undertaken by the MPS and community safety partnerships. However there seemed to be no consistency in the availability or use of such data between partnerships. The one commonly

³¹ The categories in the annual Child in Need assessment return that accord most closely to definitions of exploitation are as follows: 10A – Missing' 11A - Child Sexual Exploitation, 12A – Trafficking, 13A – Gangs and 14A - Socially unacceptable behaviour (which has its own definition).

reported pattern is that datasets were *‘social care and victim heavy’*, with a need for *‘more police data to ensure that the offender element is available and analysed’*.

158. Partnerships reported receiving data from some BCU police teams, but not others. Again there seems to be no common pattern, suggesting that over time different requests have been made or information updates offered, with no consistent MPS policy as to what data should be provided. It may be that different BCUs prepare different internal reports so have different data available to share. Some partnerships received police data only as a commissioned report, rather than being a regular feature of the dataset.
159. As well as spanning a range of criminal offences, police interactions over exploitation produce different types of information which can be recorded in different ways. This includes intelligence about risk from different sources, suspicion that a crime has been committed, and a firm allegation, report or conviction. These categories of information tend to be recorded in different police systems according to the reliability and certainty of the information. Any of these reports might concern individual or multiple potential victims / or potential perpetrators, with some individuals falling within both categories. One consequence is that information is often entered in system fields that only allow data entry in free text, making it much more difficult to generate or share data and measure outcomes and impact. It was suggested in peer review discussions that the patterns of behaviour that constitute criminal exploitation (for example cuckooing of homes, robberies, arrests for drug possession or support, physical violence and knife possession) are more easily recorded than patterns of behaviour linked to suspected sexual exploitation, which can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from ordinary interactions.
160. Taken together, these factors have reinforced the tendency for motivated individuals to devise *ad hoc* local approaches to capture a picture of exploitation. One police officer told the review that *‘individuals and teams are prone to generate bespoke databases and spreadsheets, which can’t communicate with one another and operate in silos, only being understood by the person who created them and becoming redundant when that person moves onto a new job’*. While well-meant, and possibly useful in the short-term, this type of approach does not help the long term development of services.

NHS and education data

161. In principle there is a shared understanding that data from education and health sources is critical in understanding the characteristics of the cohort of young people who are at risk of exploitation, highlighting background risk factors (such as poor school attendance and school suspensions and exclusion) and understanding the roles of services that may come in contact with adolescents who are at risk of harm (for example through a cluster of presentations at sexual health clinics or emergency departments). However data from the NHS and education sources is rarely reported as featuring in partnership exploitation datasets, or used to plan or prioritise services.
162. A number of possible explanations for this can be advanced, stemming from within the health and education sectors:
 - For the reasons set out in Section 4.3 – 4.5 above statutory guidance does not yet define an overall vision for the role of these sectors in responding to exploitation
 - In some partnerships, motivated individuals have mapped the contribution that health or education services are making, so they can see where useful data might be held. Given the

nature of service provision, obtaining that data necessarily involves the engagement of a number of health partners.

- No one with a brief in relation to children's safeguarding in the NHS is in a position to supply all of the relevant data or has that responsibility. Data requests need to be formulated and forwarded to a variety of service providers
- Health and education information is much less commonly sought by partnerships because it is seen as being less directly relevant to the management of high-risk exploitation.
- MACE arrangements are supported by information sharing agreements, which are usually quite general in nature. Requests for personalised data to cross-match with that of other sources may be refused by health agencies if they seem disproportionate to the likely benefit to patients.
- Given other priorities, partnerships may not have had the capacity to think in detail about how health and education data might enhance their work and working with colleagues in those sectors on this.

Tracker systems, minutes, monthly data briefings, and performance indicators

163. A number of self-assessment returns made reference to the use of tracker systems, databases and monthly data briefings that have the potential to track outcomes of activity and the impact of services. These terms did not have agreed or consistent meanings. Most partnerships recognised that there was room for improvement.
164. Most partnerships have developed a tracker system to capture information about the young people referred, decisions made at the pre-MACE or Operational MACE meeting including the RAG risk rating if this system is used, timescale for actions recommended, and the outcome of actions. For most partnerships the tracker is effectively a set of detailed minutes, sometimes kept as a spreadsheet from which some data can be extracted. Updates are distributed to those present at the meeting to confirm the actions agreed. Information may also be distributed to agency members not in attendance but who are responsible for updating agency records or ensuring that an exploited young person was flagged on a member agency system. Trackers can also be used to collect data about the children discussed at pre-MACE meetings.
165. The objectives of partnership trackers and the claims made as to their effectiveness varied. Generally it seemed to be easier to capture and quantify information about individual children, than about offenders or potential exploiters. A number of partnerships note that *'better reporting of themes and trends is required'* and that *'dataset indicators are under review'*. Other partnerships believed that they had made much more progress both in tracking the decisions made on individual children as well as in combining data on outcomes of individual discussions in order to identify and share information about trends in exploitation. One peer review explained how this form of mapping might provide a better overview of an emerging problem: *'it's a compilation and overview of data submitted from many sources e.g. 12 referrals that are similar or linked, but the referrers won't know that there have been 12 referrals'*.
166. A number of partnerships provided a monthly overview of key developments with data on case numbers, reports on major incidents and information about emerging problems. This was distributed to MACE and partnership members and then disseminated more widely in the workforce. This was sometimes referred to as a dataset, though based on descriptions given it usually sounded more like a regular briefing containing some data. If carefully prepared and targeted well, such reports enable professionals and leaders throughout an organisation to be fully briefed on exploitation problems and interventions.

167. The Terms of Reference of one MACE Operational group include a set of performance indicators (PIs). These are included for ease of reference as Appendix 4 of this report. The PIs are maintained and circulated for each meeting by the specialist coordinator and analyst, who also provides a commentary. PIs largely describe the characteristics of the borough's cohort of exploited young people and measure activity, giving data on the number of risk assessments for exploitation (with breakdown by sex, type of abuse and sub-type, and risk rating). Over time, if the data is maintained and approaches to assessment are consistent, trends could be identified. The PIs include measures of police disruption activity (broken down according to the type of action taken) and a number of other indicators linked to desired activities and outcomes, such as completion of return home interviews and subsequent reduction in further missing episodes. The PIs reflect the expectation that discussion at MACE meeting will lead to reduction in missing episodes. It is too early to know whether it will be possible to collect and evaluate this information over sufficient time to show meaningful trends, but it is clear that the partnership has given this considerable thought.
168. Other partnerships did not have specific PIs but told the review that they would compile themed reports from data already collected (for example attendance and exclusion data) and data specifically collected on aspects of exploitation. In a number of cases these had assisted in moving exploitation or adolescent safeguarding higher up the agenda of the partnership.

Use of proprietary software to match and analyse data, and to present trends

169. Two of the partnerships that participated in peer reviews are adapting widely available, brand-named data analysis and presentation tools to understand the characteristics of exploitation better.
170. One peer review authority uses the software to match and merge data from local authority education, social care and YOS data systems, together with information from MPS MERLIN reports which are manually entered into a local authority client record system. There is no sharing or matching with health service information. This system enables the local authority to map and analyse data on background risk factors, characteristics and major incidents. It is also very effective at identifying children missing from contact with services (i.e. showing up in one part of the system but missing from another, or not in contact). A particularly useful feature is the facility to present information graphically and to identify and display links between children, even when this is not revealed in professional records. An analysis using this tool is presented at the quarterly strategic meeting.
171. It is revealing that, despite the use of this facility, the partnership remains very dissatisfied with the ability of its strategic MACE meeting to influence high level policy and priorities. This borough has a very detailed weekly operational exploitation meeting, but has only recently set up a monthly meeting to discuss themes and trends. The partnership hopes that this will lead to an improved understanding of trends which having data, however well-presented, does not in itself provide.
172. This suggests that while the availability of software to analyse and present information is important, it will not lead to positive developments in practice unless the whole system is geared to obtaining the right information inputs and that those most involved in MACE interrogate the data in an intelligent way. Some partnerships report that it is possible to do this with a less sophisticated data analysis as long as professionals are able to spot trends and changes in activity and to ask questions about how the partnership should respond. For example

another partnership told the peer review that it had been able to spot an increase in concerning presentations of young girls in a particular venue, possibly linked to gangs, leading to further detailed enquiries and planning of interventions.

173. A second peer review partnership uses a different (but essentially similar) software product, preparing the data analysis as part of a monthly cycle of meetings. This gives a very detailed description of the cohort characteristics, information about locations and themes. The partnership told the review that it hopes to combine this with an approach to measuring impact on individual children, described below.

Data analysts

174. Although partnerships were not asked to comment on this specifically, a number of self-assessments highlighted the role played by data analysts to evaluate and present information. Others felt that they could not make progress without the use of a dedicated analyst, or skilled technical support in considering how to combine data from different sources and present it in an accessible way. Analyst time had either been provided by the police or from a local authority data performance team. There is no common approach either within agencies or partnerships. Some analysts are located in unexpected places in the local system because the case has been made for data analysis and funding has been provided at a particular point (e.g. linked to an integrated gangs team, or the MASH or a particular police team). Sometimes when analysis was requested, a short-term resource was allocated. One BCU had allocated the time of an analyst to support the MACE and other partnership groups.
175. **The agreement of a pan-London dataset should reinforce the need for a consistent approach to the use of data analysts in each partnership, BCU and NHS locality. Their brief would be defined by a regular reporting cycle, rather than a response to *ad hoc* requests as sometimes happens.**

Using data to make more systematic judgements of the impact of services on young people

176. Peer reviews sought information on the steps being taken by partnerships to measure the impact of the services provided within the MACE arrangements on young people. Measurement of the impact of services suggests the comparison of metrics recorded in relation to the young person at the point when evidence of exploitation is identified and first assessed, and later during the process of service provision. Two approaches to identifying a baseline measurement were suggested during the peer reviews though, as far as we know, no partnership has yet started this work.
177. The first suggestion is to make use of a standardised measure of psychological wellbeing such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) at the beginning of an intervention and at a later point or points, including potentially as a follow up to the intervention. A number of practical and research issues would need to be considered in detail, not least of which would be the need to demonstrate that the SDQ (or any alternative measure proposed) provided a reliable measure of psychological wellbeing for a young person who was at risk of exploitation.
178. A second approach would be to seek a broader description and grading of the young person's safety and risk at agreed points in their contact with services. Local authorities already using practice approaches linked to the Signs of Safety approach might be able to develop that approach. Other similar tools might be available.

179. The review is also aware of projects to provide mental health services to young people who are considered to be at risk of exploitation are currently being developed and implemented, including the pan-London scheme 'Your Choice' which is overseen by LASOB. **As part of the evaluation of this project, measures are being developed to describe the impact of the service on the young people reached by this project. If the approach developed appears to be viable consideration should be given to adopting it more widely.**
180. These three methods of measuring impact are all (or would be) ambitious. Typically such approaches are easier to implement in a clinical setting where standardised assessments can be applied and are much more difficult to apply in day to day safeguarding work where there will be obvious practical difficulties. Work would be required to determine whether any proposed metric captured relevant changes and whether it was possible to separate out the impact of specific interventions or periods of service provision from one another. There might also be great difficulties in persuading a group of young people (who professionals already find difficult to engage) to participate in this additional process of information gathering. This could be difficult at any time, but perhaps particularly in the early stages of an intervention when the focus of interventions should be on establishing basic trust and engagement. One partnership, which had tried to repeat assessments of harm and risk every 6 months or following significant events found that staff were not consistent enough in completing assessments to monitor impact. Repeated re-assessment might diminish engagement.
181. This discussion touches on the more fundamental question of how the impact of work to safeguard young people from exploitation should be judged. It is often stated that progress in working with exploited children often occurs in very small incremental steps, noticed through a willingness to trust or engage with a professional. Progress is shaped by many factors and setbacks often arise as a result of real world events that are outside the control of both professionals and young people. Attention should be paid to the views of young people themselves about the impact of interventions. This raises important questions. How are we to understand the concept of impact if a young person has a positive view of an intervention but continues to be seriously harmed or to harm others?

Summary and recommendations

182. The partnerships that reported making good progress in this area recognised that there was still much more to do in order to ensure that data collection and analysis would be good enough to enable senior managers and leaders to make decisions on the allocation and direction of resources that fully reflected children's needs and the impact of existing services. The measurement of impact raises difficult ethical and practical questions.
- 183. Partnerships who believe that they are making good progress in the capture and evaluation of data should share details of their work and systems with London Innovation and Improvement Alliance. Project coordination time should be allocated to support the sharing of effective systems with a view to the development of a common approach. The dataset being developed by one borough under the government innovations funding should be shared with local authorities.**
184. The set of performance indicators currently in use by one partnership should be considered as the basis for a London-wide set of indicators.
185. Measures of impact being developed and tested by the 'Your Choice' project should be considered for wider use in all exploitation referrals.

186. The NHS and the MPS should initiate work to agree data sets for local health services and police activity. The NHS as a whole should set expectations for a minimum local dataset, bearing in mind that local patterns of service provision vary. Performance Indicators should follow.

5.3 Community safety and safeguarding in localities

Introduction

187. The MACE self-assessment asked about the relationship between the MACE arrangements and the local authority community safety partnership (CSP). A number of peer review meetings explored whether the MACE had succeeded in developing initiatives that would respond to concerns about groups of young people and reduce the risk of exploitation in public spaces, such as parks, leisure centres, housing estates and shopping centres. A number referred to the influence of the contextual safeguarding approach. Depending on its local priorities, one of the main concerns of CSPs is to respond to community concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour in neighbourhoods and communities.
188. Although there is self-evidently an important overlap between community safety and safeguarding activities, there are also important differences. They derive from different statutory responsibilities and have historically had a different focus, involving different groups of professionals. Sometimes they are underpinned by different values. Different funding streams have historically been available, though increasingly commissioners and external funders are seeking to promote initiatives with overlapping objectives.
189. The review of MACE arrangements strongly suggests that progress in both spheres of activity will only be made if the local safeguarding children partnership and the CSP develop a strong and effective relationship. It was not the intention that this issue would be a main focus of the MACE review. This section of the report sets out some initial reflections which it is hoped will assist local partnerships in developing this relationship, based on the very limited information provided in the self-assessments and peer reviews.

Findings from self-assessments and peer reviews

190. A number of safeguarding partnerships described their working arrangements with the CSP very positively, indicating that good relationships between the MACE and the CSP had enabled agencies to identify new problems and had assisted in activity to combat exploitation. One partnership noted close working over daily updates on serious incidents: *'the MACE chair works closely with the Community Safety Unit who also attend and co-chair the daily ... (violence and exploitation) meeting'*. The same return noted how *'Community Safety Unit also provide hotspot locations to the panel on a monthly basis'*. A number of other self assessments described similar cooperation noting, for example that the MACE panel *'receives an overview of hotspot locations from the Community Safety Team every month which is discussed and then disseminated'*. Another described information flowing in the other direction, with the MACE *'identifying themes and hotspots and working alongside the Anti-Social Behaviour and Safer Neighbourhoods Team team to address concerns and create safe spaces'*. It is not currently possible to know what impact this activity has had and whether it has led to the safeguarding of individuals who are at risk.

191. Other self-assessments described cooperation in the sharing of information, but difficulties in agreeing and taking action to address concerns. For example:

'Many of the locations of concern are raised due to crime within the location such as drug dealing or violence. Although it is effective to know locations, there needs to be clearer understanding of priorities and capacity if planning to make spaces safer is to be achieved.'

Another self-assessment noted that making effective plans to make locations safer has been a challenge, suggesting that the ability of agencies to intervene is limited:

'A process has been developed to deal with groups and locations that are being highlighted through (MACE) which should resolve this issue. It will define a lead and clear direction; however this is also dependent on the concerns around the location and agency powers within that.'

192. In some boroughs there is considerable integration of activity. For example, integrated gangs teams comprising officers from the police and the local authority may include colleagues seconded from community safety or be led by a manager with a background in community safety. In other local authority areas the two services appear to operate in parallel, perhaps linked by mutual attendance at a number of panels. Sometimes panels seem to have overlapping functions and responsibilities. Partnerships were not asked for more detailed information on this in their self-assessments. The activity of the community safety partnership is able to attract interest and support from elected council members, as well as funding from external sources.

The interaction of approaches with different objectives and cultures

193. The challenge of bringing together community safety and safeguarding arrangements is not simply managerial or administrative. Services within these partnerships have traditionally had different objectives, reflecting and reinforcing distinct ideologies and cultures. Historically CSPs developed as a response to community concerns about anti-social behaviour, often articulated through and by local politicians. They have often been led by the police, focused on enforcement using CCTV and a range of restrictive legal orders. Sometimes they have been criticised for displacing problems from one location to another, rather than addressing the root causes of concerns. Typically they have not been characterised by a child-centred or 'child-first' approach. Safeguarding responses to abuse and neglect within the family have developed over several decades and are criticised for having limited applicability to extra-familial harm. Critics view them as systems in which families become problems to be managed, rather than helped.
194. Contextual safeguarding approaches are focused on the assessment of risk and harm arising from the places and contexts in which young people live and are educated, deriving from an initial focus on peer-on-peer sexual harm. References to contextual safeguarding in the 2018 statutory safeguarding guidance³² along with central and local government funding for pilot programmes have encouraged local authorities and safeguarding partnerships to develop contextual safeguarding initiatives. This has led to concerns that practices are developing that *'while not aligning to the principles of Contextual Safeguarding, are presented under its banner'* which may serve to facilitate *'the expansion and intrusion of surveillance into the lives of children and families'*. Advocates of contextual safeguarding have been keen to stress what they see as

³² HM Government (2018) Working Together to Safeguard Children (page 23). References to contextual safeguarding were removed from the 2020 version of the document, being replaced by less specific references to extra-familial harm.

fundamental differences in underlying philosophies and in the nature of the relationships that will exist between professionals and families.³³

195. In a number of peer review meetings partnerships described their work to implement approaches that drew on insights from contextual safeguarding, enriching community safety approaches and making it possible to 1) address safeguarding concerns arising in specific localities, or for specific groups of young people, 2) build shared priorities across MACE and Community Safety Partnerships and 3) address and change attitudes in the wider community to become more appreciative of the needs of young people and less likely to scapegoat them. A number of partnerships have developed processes and templates that enable a referral to be made describing concerns about a location. Two partnerships are known to have developed methods of rating and describing the risk in specific locations in ways which share some language and concepts with the levels of need that are currently used to describe individual children. Rather than being categorised according to the type of activity that has been observed (such as for example 'dealing in drugs') the focus is on the harm that is believed to be occurring. An understanding of the harms is then described within what the partnership calls a 'Context and Location - Levels of Need Framework'. The peer review said that this initiative was '*based on a reading of contextual safeguarding but without being a formal pilot*'. Other partnerships may have done similar work.
196. **Given these initial findings, one of the most important tasks of the strategic MACE group (or the body playing the strategic role in the local MACE arrangements) will be to develop a strong and effective working relationship with the CSP. This should enable the development of complementary strategies and action plans, as well as exploring approaches that enable colleagues with different responsibilities and objectives to work together. It will be for each partnership to determine how best to do this, but it will be useful to share successful models and approaches.**

5.4 Working across local authority and BCU boundaries

197. Discussions in LASOB that led to the decision to undertake the MACE peer review frequently identified concerns about cross-borough working. Liaison across local authority boundaries is made more challenging by the differences in approaches to exploitation and in the MACE arrangements. When a new multi-agency forum is created, it is not unusual for responsibilities in relation to cross-borough working to be less than clear and to evolve over time.³⁴ Many of the difficulties for MACE arise because there is no framework of statutory guidance, so neighbouring authorities interpret their responsibilities differently or have different structures.
198. Some self-assessments highlight positives. Many partnerships report developing collaborative relationships with agencies in neighbouring authorities, sharing information and agreeing tactical responses to exploitation and gang activity. Once an approach to cross-border working

³³ Wroe and Lloyd have described in detail the underlying differences in focus, methods of intervention and impact of approaches characterised as 'watching over' or 'working with' young people and families who are at risk of exploitation. Lauren Elizabeth Wroe and Jenny Lloyd (2020) Watching over or Working with? Understanding Social Work Innovation in Response to Extra-Familial Harm, Social Sciences, Soc. Sci. 2020, 9, 37; doi:10.3390/socsci9040037

³⁴ For some time this could have been said of the MARAC domestic violence arrangements

is established, management of future incidents is easier because personal connections have been made and practical approaches have become part of the organisational memory.

Aspects of practice in which cross-border collaboration is required

199. Self-assessment returns identified the following aspects of practice in which work to safeguard children requires the sharing of information or joint approaches across local authority boundaries:
- Responding to the needs of young people and families moving in or out of the local authority area. Moves may occur as the result of a relocation or placement planned or encouraged by professionals as part of the response to risks of exploitation. Some families and young people just move, for any number of personal reasons, not necessarily linked to the problem of exploitation
 - Creating working arrangements and relationships when, for example, exploitation involves victims or offenders from more than one borough
 - Making links with services in other boroughs when children from those boroughs come to attention through exploitation
 - Sharing relevant information when a young person from your authority is known to be involved in exploitation in another area (either as a victim or perpetrator)
 - Deciding how to address the issues that arise when agency boundaries do not coincide with those of local authorities (most commonly a concern for the police, but also for the NHS and other agencies).
 - Arrangements for pan-London and out of London data sharing and activities.
200. Self-assessments revealed no consistency in the aspects of practice in which there had been positive developments, nor in areas in which partnerships struggled. For example:
- 'South London Cross Borough Contextual Harm meeting (has been) established with CSC Exploitation Leads/Coordinators from neighbouring boroughs (including Lambeth, Bromley, Sutton, Merton, Wandsworth)'*
- 'An updated contact list circulated via above forum for each London borough re their MACE leads allows for better intelligence sharing at strategic level between boroughs'*
- 'There are proactive mapping meetings with areas in the UK where young people are located'*
- 'This is complicated due to lack of professional relationships across areas and difference in practice across BCUs. There is not a consistent protocol around missing children, strategy attendance, etc.'*
- 'We need to strengthen information sharing between local BCU and response to enquiries where it occurs outside our command area'*
201. Other than those that have arisen through the oversight of particular operational activities, there are no formal operational links between MACE meetings (pre-MACE or Operational MACE) in different local authority areas. This should be addressed quickly. The responsibility of the MACE in relation to case transfers should be agreed. Practice guidance on child exploitation is currently in development. This proposes a protocol and practice guidance to be used when a family is relocated because of concerns about exploitation. This could easily be supported by common templates for relation and case transfer. A number of self-assessments highlighted the value of cross border and even pan-London approaches or systems being extended to address issues that repeatedly arise, for example missing children. No specific suggestions were made.

Long-term arrangements when boundaries do not coincide

202. Some partnerships have sought to create long term arrangements for collaboration over MACE across local authority boundaries. The reasons for doing this vary and a number of experiences and approaches are explored below. Police officers acknowledge that the merger into BCU structures requires them to cover more than one local authority area, but often express concern at the duplication of meetings discussing similar issues in neighbouring local authorities. Frustration is heightened by the use of different referral forms, risk assessment templates and screening processes. The need to commit resources to similar meetings in different boroughs exacerbates difficulties of officer turnover referred to previously as new officers may be required to learn two or sometimes three different systems.

Which patterns of cross borough merger or liaison are easiest to implement effectively?

203. Four of the peer reviews included MACE arrangements with either BCUs or boroughs with some common areas of responsibility, in a variety of configurations:
- 1) A BCU working with two local authorities (this is most typical configuration except that most BCUs cover three local authority areas). Both MACEs participated in peer reviews. Both boroughs have substantial youth violence and exploitation concerns.
 - 2) Two local authorities that have merged services many council services and have a shared management structure for children's social care services. The authorities are within the same BCU which also covers two other local authority areas
 - 3) Three local authority areas which have a number of merged children's and administrative services (mainly in two boroughs). The three boroughs are coterminous with the BCU and have tried to create MACE arrangements that work across the BCU, while at the same time continuing to hold meetings that respond to specific local needs.

Evaluation of these arrangements may point the way to models of cross-border collaboration that should be explored in the future, highlighting benefits and challenges.

204. In example 1) both sets of MACE arrangements were reported to work well. Both local authorities had committed substantial additional resources to exploitation work and their children's services are rated as performing well. Although there are some differences in the MACE arrangements, the MPS representative stated that he had no difficulty in dealing with these and had strong relationships with both boroughs. A more thorough evaluation would be required to confirm if one set of arrangements was in practice more effective.
205. In example 2) the arrangements worked extremely well because both the police and the local authorities could adopt a single approach. Relationships in this MACE had been built with a particularly committed and effective Detective Inspector, who had worked in safeguarding for a substantial time. A number of strategies (as well as the safeguarding partnership) were shared across the boroughs which appear to have similar exploitation profiles and a relatively low level of serious youth violence. The local authorities had launched a number of common community safety and violence reduction initiatives so it was natural that there would be collaboration over the Operational MACE. The peer review discussion reflected a number of joint initiatives rather than episodic cross-borough working. The peer review discussion revealed a high level of mutual trust between agencies and individuals.
206. In example 3) the local authorities had sought for some time to create a strategic MACE covering the three local authority areas and the coterminous BCU. The difficulty in achieving this was said to stem in large part from frequent changes in senior police officers, making it very difficult

to undertake the development work necessary. This had been resolved as the peer review was being undertaken and the 3-borough strategic MACE group was able to hold its first meeting, after a gap of more than a year. In the absence of a shared strategic approach the local authorities had continued to maintain and develop local multi-agency MACE arrangements that were seen as relevant to their local exploitation and youth violence profiles. This had led to a number of panels and meetings being convened in each borough. As the three boroughs remain separate entities, they have continued to develop separate plans for community safety and other violence reduction. There is a strong appetite to have a three-borough MACE.

207. It remains to be seen whether the development of a mechanism for strategic oversight of exploitation will lead to an overall streamlining of arrangements within the local authority areas, all three of which have a significant (but varied) gang, youth violence or exploitation profile with strong local operations to counter exploitation. Even though it makes sense to work across the BCU, it remains to be seen whether mechanisms can be found that are able to assimilate the learning from front line practice in three local authority areas to produce useful, shared strategies.
208. The three experiences described suggest that the strongest influence on arrangements for working together across boundaries will be the willingness and ability of local authorities to agree shared approaches and to have management arrangements in place to implement them. Where neighbouring local authorities that fall within the same BCU have merged many services, this would appear to be relatively straightforward. If local demographic, social and political factors strongly influence the approach to exploitation, violence reduction and multi-agency working, it will be much more difficult to find shared approaches across boroughs. In that case, merging MACE arrangements across local authorities will be very challenging and may not produce significant gains.
209. **On the basis of the information provided by the self-assessments and peer reviews, merging MACE arrangements across boroughs is not advised unless local authorities have either merged their services, or have a long-standing commitment to collaboration that can be sustained beyond local managerial and political changes. In general quicker progress is likely to be made through the standardisation of approaches in agreed practice areas across London.** The standardisation of processes and practice is discussed further in Part 6 of this report.
210. **A cross-borough protocol for the transfer of cases and relocation of families should be agreed urgently. This should be developed at the same level of detail as the agreements reached in the London safeguarding children procedures for children at risk of harm from within families. The role of MACE meetings or child exploitation coordinators in cross borough transfer and relocation (if any) should be defined and implemented consistently across London.**

5.5 Securing support for young adults who are at risk of exploitation

211. Many young people who are being exploited lose contact with services on reaching the age of 18, though there may be no fundamental change in the young person's experience. The operational protocol created the expectation that the MACE arrangements will provide *'seamless and effective care...to all those at risk of exploitation'*. It is anticipated that this will require *'an effective and robust referral process... (and) a strong relationship between children's and adults social care so that those who provide the appropriate services and support for these young adults are given the right information and opportunities to implement suitable*

safeguarding plans'. (Operational Protocol, page 35) These intentions have yet to result in consistent arrangements across London.

212. All the MACE self-assessment returns identified the provision of support for young adults (usually taken to mean those aged 18-25) as a priority, often noting that this as an area currently subject to review and development in the MACE arrangements. It was widely recognised that success in addressing this depends on cooperation from both adult and children's services and the buy-in from agencies with a specific remit for adults. It is recognised that in general the statutory responsibilities of services for adults are more limited than those applying to children. Self-assessment returns highlighted three aspects in particular:

- Service provision for people aged 18+ for whom the local authority already has a statutory responsibility.
- Steps taken to commission additional services specifically for these young people, as well as others aged 18-25, who are at risk of exploitation
- Steps being taken to modify MACE panel structures and arrangements so that the needs of young adults can be addressed.

The comments that follow are relatively brief, recognising that this is an area that has been described extensively.³⁵

Extent of statutory responsibilities for young adults aged 18-25

213. Local authorities have specific statutory responsibilities in relation to two groups of young adults: 1) young people who meet the criteria for being treated as a care leaver and 2) young people who have been identified as having a high level of additional social and educational needs, including those with a disability, requiring an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP). For both groups responsibilities may extend to the age of 25. Other agencies are expected to cooperate with the local authority in making provision. Young adults falling within either group should receive an assessment which may lead to the provision of services as a continuation of the EHCP or, for care leavers, a Pathway Plan. A number of partnerships reported that arrangements are being put in place to ensure that where appropriate such plans identify and respond to the risk of harm from exploitation, developing a specific safety plan when relevant.
214. Both EHCPs and Pathway Plans can only be developed with the agreement and active participation of the young adult. As a result there is no guarantee that members of these groups will all receive an assessment or services as part of a plan. Relevant services may also not be aware that a young person is at risk of exploitation, so the plan may not address relevant concerns. Contact with young people under either plan is sometimes either infrequent or irregular.

Commissioning additional support

215. When there is no specific statutory duty to provide services, the local authority may choose to commission services with a remit to work with young adults. Services of this type highlighted in peer reviews and self-assessments included:
- voluntary organisations, including a number specialising in the provision of services for young women

³⁵ See for example <https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/transitional-safeguarding-adolescence-to-adulthood-strategic-briefing/> The Tackling Child Exploitation website has a number of other substantial documents which are most easily found by searching the website using the term transitional

- integrated gangs or exploitation teams often consisting of police officers, local authority employees and youth workers
- a variety of community-based teams providing access to education, training, or housing and benefits advice and advocacy.

Commissioning arrangements for such services need to include arrangements for record keeping and information sharing. A number of partnerships have highlighted the difficulties that can be created for local authorities who may not be able to create records for a service user aged over 18 who does not have a Pathway plan or EHCP.

Designing a panel structure that can oversee the transition to receipt of services as a young adult

216. A number of partnerships have recognised the need for a panel within their MACE arrangements that will assist in making services available for over 18s, typically by seeking to unblock problems of service provision for individuals and by contributing to discussions about the planning and strategic development of services for young adults. Partnerships that are most successful in following the VOLT approach to the MACE operational group (see Section 3.4 above) are able to devote a meaningful part of their meeting to young people who are approaching the age of 18, and to young adults. The age at which these discussions start varies. A number of partnerships now propose to create a panel devoted exclusively to young adults. Some partnerships have struggled to secure representation from agencies with an adult focus for example noting that *'attendance at the 18-25 panel is inconsistent and the referrals come from too few sources'*. No self-assessment return mentioned the National Probation Service.³⁶
217. Once those meetings are established, they will need to ensure that attention is focused not only on those young people who have a right to statutory support beyond the age of 18 but also to young adults who have not previously been identified as being at risk of exploitation. These should focus on the design of pathways for the provision of support for young adults taking account of the additional challenges that they face, such as being dealt with and sentenced in adult courts, and receiving less support as part of their release arrangements from prison. Housing representation was highlighted as critical.
218. **The review is not in a position to recommend particular approaches. This is an area in which the sharing of information about initiatives that have proved to be successful can easily be done as long as relevant structures are created. There is already an extensive literature. LASOB should consider whether it has a role in making proposals on this, bearing in mind websites, blogs and forums that already exist. Leaders and senior managers in both children's and adult services need to commit to this activity. Engagement with the London Association of Directors of Adult Services, the National Probation Service and other relevant bodies should be sought.**

³⁶ The London Association of Directors of Adult Social Services website has only a small number of references to transitional services and support, mainly in conference discussions and presentations. A small number of Safeguarding Adult Reviews have focused on the deaths of young adults.

PART 6 WHAT IS LEGITIMATE LOCAL VARIATION? WHEN SHOULD CONSISTENCY BE EXPECTED?

219. Initial LASOB discussions on the MACE arrangements briefly considered the extent to which local variation was known to exist, might be desirable and was perhaps inevitable. The starting point of the MACE peer review was that there was a greater need for consistency, but not uniformity in approach. Although these terms featured in the self-assessment material circulated to local partnerships, it became apparent to the project team that we did not always know what was meant when they were used. The self-assessments and peer reviews have made it possible to identify specific aspects of MACE arrangements where there is a very strong case that greater consistency will bring more effective service provision and where variation in approach is clearly counter-productive.

Why is there so much variation in MACE arrangements?

220. Variation and difference in approach have been highlighted in almost every section of this report. Self-assessments and peer reviews have also provided a more systematic understanding of the causes of local variation. Local demands and patterns of exploitation differ. Local structures of accountability to the safeguarding partnership and other bodies vary, legitimately and within the guidance in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018. This is probably inevitable and not necessarily a problem as long as each local partnership is able to prioritise and plan effectively, taking into account local needs.
221. There has been no national statutory guidance on extra-familial harm or exploitation. In the absence of such guidance, the MPS sought to define shared approaches and standards through the operational protocol. The protocol has not been implemented universally. Although the MPS has implemented a number of common templates and procedures, there is much variation in police engagement with MACE across London and variation in MPS practice. Although individual professionals and institutions do much valuable work, neither the NHS, nor the education sector has developed a common vision or approach to exploitation work. Hence contributions to many local MACE meetings fall short of what might be provided. A number of local partnerships and local authorities have hosted pilot projects which have inevitably led to variation in service delivery. Findings tend to be reported in a qualitative fashion, highlighting the views of professionals who have participated, but usually with little comparative analysis and no mandate for wider implementation.

In which aspects of organisational arrangements and practice should consistency be expected?

Basic MACE meetings

222. The basic pattern of MACE meetings, and the language and terminology used to describe them, should be consistent across London. In particular each partnership should have an operational MACE meeting and adopt the VOLT pattern for its agenda. The most effective operational MACE meetings discuss a small number of individual young people according to agreed criteria, but the agenda is largely focused on identifying broader themes and patterns in exploitation, coordinating disruption activity and overall strategy. Unimportant local differences in names and acronyms used for these meetings should be eliminated.
223. For the Operational MACE to be effective, a pre-MACE discussion should be held periodically screening the cohort of young people who are at risk of exploitation. This meeting should also

set the agenda for the Operational MACE. Detailed arrangements for such meetings and the role of the exploitation coordinator and statutory agencies should be determined locally.

224. Common standards of chairing should be set for MACE meetings. The current specification in the operational protocol is that chairing should be the shared responsibility of a senior social care manager (such as head of service) and a police officer at Chief Inspector rank. Examples have been seen of Detective Inspectors successfully chairing Operational MACE meetings, but this should not become the norm. MACE chairs need to have sufficient experience to chair meetings effectively. If potential chairs lack subject knowledge or multi-agency chairing experience, training should be available. MACE chairs should have a network of ongoing support and practice development. It is reasonable to expect a MACE chair to maintain the role for 12 months at the very least.
225. Arrangements for strategic oversight of MACE will necessarily reflect local partnership accountability arrangements. The local safeguarding children partnership should ensure that there are satisfactory arrangements for planning and prioritisation of work to tackle exploitation. This should be supported by the agreement of a common set of data and performance indicators, which should be reported periodically, fulfil the requirements of a pan-London dataset and be made available for comparison across London.

Basics of inter-agency working

226. There should be agreed common thresholds for identifying children who are at risk of significant harm as a result of exploitation or extra-familial harm and therefore in need of a child protection plan (in future a Child Community Safety Plan). Consistent criteria should also be used for children who require a child in need plan or targeted family support. These should turn on risk to the child, not shortcomings in parenting, except when both apply. It is inevitable that there will be a degree of variation in local professional interpretation of these criteria, but they should not be significant.
227. Once the statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 is rewritten, revised approaches should be included in amended London Safeguarding Children Procedures. Local partnerships are expected to adhere to these and that should continue to be the case in relation to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.
228. Partnerships in London should adopt common checklists and risk assessment tools for referral to the local authority and police, assessment and referral to pre-MACE or Operational MACE. These should apply to individual children, but uniformity in templates would also be useful for referrals about localities and themes in exploitation. Examples exist and a common template drawing on the best currently available should be developed.
229. Partnerships should seek to eliminate differences in information-sharing agreements between boroughs and agencies across London, and in the sharing of information in practice. Agreements on information sharing with the NHS, schools and voluntary sector should be consistent across local authority boundaries. The NHS should be asked to approve a model template, which health commissioners and providers should be expected to implement.

Basics of cross-borough working

230. A protocol should be agreed for the movement of children and families across local authority boundaries, including (but not limited to) the transfer of case responsibility. This should set out

the responsibilities of individual agencies, and the responsibility of meetings and individuals within the MACE arrangements. MACE is not expected to case manage work with individual young people, but it should be expected to have oversight of case transfer and ensure that partnerships comply with approaches set out in procedures and guidance.

231. Procedures for key aspects of practice should be common across London, including for example on missing children

Agency engagement and representation

232. Membership of Operational MACE meetings should be consistent across London, though subject to detailed local variation according to the exploitation profile and the make-up of service provision.
233. Minimum expectations should be set for NHS involvement in MACE arrangements and should be as consistent as possible. Arrangements agreed with the NHS should refer specifically to roles of commissioners, safeguarding specialists and provider organisations. The role of the Integrated Care Systems in relation to child exploitation should be agreed.
234. In each MACE arrangement, there should be adequate representation from the education sector, to support both individual casework and to help lead the strategic development of responses to exploitation.
235. Voluntary sector representation should be secured in local MACE arrangements, depending on local service roles and agreements. This should include attendance both 1) at discussions on specific young people if relevant within the MACE arrangements and 2) at more strategic discussions.

PART 7 RECOMMENDATIONS

The scale of work required and an overview of governance and accountability for changes agreed

The first six recommendations address the context, scale and complexity of the work required to implement a consistent approach to MACE arrangements. They seek to situate necessary work on MACE within the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the recent Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

Both the minimum standard of consistency (Part 6 above) and the recommendations below require the implementation of common approaches to the safeguarding young people from extra-familial harm and exploitation, rather than just agreement on consistency in the approach to MACE meetings and panels.

Some of the recommendations to individual agencies (such as the MPS) point to the need for organisational change in the way in which exploitation is dealt with. Achieving consistency across the NHS in London will be a substantial task. Our inquiries indicate that there is a structure to achieve this through the NHS representatives on the London Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive. The fragmented nature of the education sector will make it more difficult to achieve consistency in approach. Responsibility for taking forward this agenda in the education sector should sit with the Director of Children's Services.

1. **A project team should be put in place to oversee the implementation of agreed recommendations of this report and to refine them as required. It should include representatives with experience of safeguarding in local authorities, the MPS and the NHS; project management skills and time will be required, as well as some administrative support.**
2. **LASOB (or a group nominated by LASOB) should have continuing oversight of this project and its outputs, including for example the development and periodic oversight of a pan-London exploitation dataset. Practice guidance endorsed or published by LASOB should reflect revised statutory guidance and assist professionals in the implementation of such guidance. Links to and overlap with the London Safeguarding Children Procedures must be explicit in the procedures, templates, checklists and practice guidance developed.**
3. **Periodic review of the London Child Exploitation Operating Protocol will be required. The next review should take account of activity in London to pilot recommendations of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care as learning emerges. The next published edition of the protocol should take into account the findings of pilot studies and be ready for publication as closely as possible to future changes in statutory child safeguarding guidance.**

The many factors that have led to local differences in approach will not diminish. The scale of activity in London is itself a challenge. Agreement to cooperate on the sharing of a successful approach being implemented in (say) five local authority areas would require that the remaining 27 make changes to some aspects of their way of working. Although most of these changes would be small, partnerships and local authorities who wish to maintain existing approaches, some of which may be viewed as being successful, will inevitably push back. Before substantial work begins, agreement in principle with key stakeholders about the need for greater consistency is essential.

Any change has to take into account the response of the government to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care which, at the time of writing, remains uncertain. Proposals are being developed to pilot some of the independent review recommendations in London. In relation to child exploitation, this should begin with a rapid evaluation of the work that has already been undertaken, for example by those partnerships that have developed alternatives to the use of child protection plans. These inevitably contain some elements of the proposed Child Community Safety Plan and should shape its development in practice. Pilots should be designed to test what has currently been developed and avoid starting work covering ground that is already familiar.

4. **Before substantial work begins to implement the recommendations of this review the London Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive should agree in principle that greater consistency is required along the lines set out in Part 6 of this report.**
5. **London ADCS, the NHS and the MPS should obtain as much clarity as possible on the likely outcome and timescale for the revision of Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.**
6. **The project team (Recommendation 1) should identify areas in which quick improvements can be made that do not rely on the full revision of statutory guidance and procedures.**

Chairing of MACE meetings

7. **With oversight from LASOB and the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance, training should be developed for prospective Operational MACE chairs. Arrangements should be made for the provision of a network of continuing support.**

Agreed common pan-London approaches to MACE arrangements

As a matter of principle all future multi-agency templates and guidance on exploitation should be pan-London. Formats for collating information on locations and themes should at the very least have core, shared elements and do not need to vary substantially between local authorities.

8. **Common multi-agency templates and checklists should be developed for inclusion in the protocol and the London Safeguarding Children Procedures for the referral, initial screening and risk assessment of children who may be at risk of exploitation.**
9. **LASOB and the London Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive should agree to adopt the model of the Operational MACE set out in the 4th edition (March 2021) of the operational protocol and the associated template agenda for use across London.**

Effectiveness of police contribution to MACE arrangements

10. **The MPS should consider the merger of teams or the reallocation of team responsibilities within BCU structures in order to improve the police contribution to multi-agency exploitation work. There should be greater consistency in these structures and arrangements across the MPS BCUs.**
11. **BCU Chief Superintendents should take steps to reduce the rapid turnover of DCIs and Detective Superintendents in public protection with the aim of introducing the expectation that the MACE has a consistent MPS co-chair for a minimum of 12 months. Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships need to ensure that BCU Chief Superintendents are challenged if they fail to address the current pattern of rapid turnover.**
12. **The local safeguarding children partnership should ensure that MACE arrangements have regular discussion of activity to disrupt both sexual and criminal exploitation. All partner agencies must take a role in this work.**

Agency and sector contribution to MACE arrangements

13. **Across London the NHS should ensure that a senior local NHS manager or safeguarding specialist has oversight of the participation in MACE arrangements across local health providers in every local authority area. Common expectations of NHS participation in MACE meetings should be agreed. The NHS should monitor the effectiveness of its contribution as part of the London-wide governance of work to combat exploitation.**
14. **Directors of Children's Services should ensure that their MACE arrangements include adequate education sector representation. This should enable a full contribution to be made to both individual case activity and to strategic planning.**
15. **Directors of Children's Services should ensure that their MACE arrangements include adequate voluntary sector representation, appropriate to the local role in service provision. This should enable a contribution to both individual case and strategic planning.**

Development of a shared dataset and performance indicator

16. **LASOB should oversee the development of an exploitation dataset and the production of an annual report on exploitation from the statutory safeguarding partners. To facilitate this, LSCPs who believe that they are making good progress in the capture and evaluation of data should share details of their work and systems. Project coordination time should be allocated to support the sharing of effective systems with a view to the development of a common approach. The dataset that is currently being developed by one local authority under the government innovations funding should be shared with all local authorities.**
17. **The set of performance indicators (Appendix 4) currently in use by one partnership should be considered as the basis for a London-wide set of indicators. These can no doubt be improved but it may be better to adopt them across London before revising them. There is nothing to stop local partnerships using additional indicators, but compliance with a pan-London approach should be the priority.**
18. **The NHS and the MPS should initiate work to agree data sets and performance indicators for local health service and police activity on exploitation. The NHS should set expectations for a minimum local dataset, bearing in mind that local patterns of service provision vary. It should determine how data will be drawn from individual providers.**
19. **Measures of impact being developed and tested by the 'Your Choice' project should be considered for wider use in all exploitation referrals so that the impact of interventions can begin to be quantified.**

Strategic oversight

20. **LSCPs should ensure that the strategic MACE group (or the body playing the strategic role in the local MACE arrangements) develops a strong and effective working relationship with the relevant CSP in order to 1) agree shared strategies and action plans to combat exploitation and 2) to explore approaches that enable colleagues with different responsibilities and from different backgrounds to work better together.**
21. **LASOB should oversee the development of a cross-borough protocol for the transfer of cases and relocation of families. This should be developed at the same level of detail as the agreements reached in the London Safeguarding Children Procedures for children at risk of harm from within families. Any role for MACE or child exploitation coordinators in this should be defined.**
22. **LASOB should initiate work to promote common standards and approaches to the provision of services for young adults who are at risk of exploitation, including but not limited to care leavers and young people with an EHCP. Leaders and senior managers with responsibility for both children's and adult services need to commit to this work. Engagement with the London Association of Directors of Adult Services, the National Probation Service and other relevant bodies is essential.**

Project team and peer review team members

Project Team

DCI Andrew D Grant – Metropolitan Police Service

Keith Ibbetson – Independent Consultant

Jeanne King – Independent Consultant

Julie Rooke – Head of Service Westminster Council

Peer review team members

DS Louise Court, Metropolitan Police Service - Central Specialist Crime

DS Karen Harlow, Metropolitan Police Service - Central Specialist Crime

Claire Hunter, Designated Nurse Safeguarding NHS South East London Bexley

DS Jim Madden, Metropolitan Police Service - Central Specialist Crime

Rachel Ringham, Head of Service Tower Hamlets Council

Lorna Waite, Designated Nurse Safeguarding NHS North West London Hounslow

Self-assessments were returned on behalf of the following local authority / local safeguarding partnership

Bexley

Brent

Camden

Croydon

Ealing

Enfield

Greenwich

Hackney

Haringey

Harrow

Hillingdon

Hounslow

Islington

Kingston

Lewisham

Merton

Redbridge

Richmond

Sutton

Three Borough MACE – Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea

Tower Hamlets

Waltham Forest

Appendix 2

MACE self-assessment template

Multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) self-assessment and peer review tool

Please return the completed template to

Date of completion	
Local authority area(s) covered by the return	
Name of person submitting the template	
Job title	
Email	
Phone contact	

Contents

Basic information about your current local MACE arrangements

Topic 1 - The MACE arrangements promote operational activity to tackle exploitation

Topic 2 - Pre-MACE activity safeguards children

Topic 3 - The MACE arrangements allow the safeguarding partnership to identify trends in exploitation and to direct resources and activity

Topic 4 - MACE leadership, chairing, membership, resourcing, and the coordinator role

Topic 5 - Procedures and protocols that support the MACE

Topic 6 - Strategic direction of activity to combat exploitation

Topic 7 – Impact of MACE and other additional observations

Page number references in this document are to The London Child Exploitation Operating Protocol 2021
<https://cscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/The-London-Child-Exploitation-Operating-Protocol-2021-MPS.pdf>

Basic information about your current local MACE arrangements

Please identify the panels and groups that meet within your current child exploitation arrangements. Please include groups that meet regularly and perform operational, planning or strategic functions in relation to criminal or sexual exploitation. If your arrangements are under review, please describe the current or most recent arrangements and use other sections of this return to give more details of the review.

Group, panel or meeting name	How often does the group meet?	Who currently chairs this meeting and who usually attends?	Briefly describe the purpose of this meeting or panel
Please submit any current or recent Terms of Reference or any documents that describe the function of these groups or meetings			

MACE local self-assessment and peer review tool

Topic 1 - The MACE arrangements promote operational activity to tackle exploitation	
Facilitates information sharing and evaluation (pages 33-34)	When there are grounds to suspect exploitation, the MACE arrangements capture key information and intelligence about young people, groups of young people, persons of concern and localities
	<p>The MACE arrangements map and track activity in relation to exploitation identifying the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the relevant MACE strand (Victim, Offender, Location or Theme) • the action agreed as a result of the meeting • who is going to be responsible for the activity agreed • the timeframe in which activity should be completed
	<p>The MACE arrangements ensure that for each case, location or theme, there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a consistent assessment of risk (given the information available) • agreement of a lead agency or authority and • clear direction for coordinated activity.
	Professionals working with children at risk of exploitation receive a clear account of discussions at the MACE discussions and find the MACE discussions helpful in their work
What is working well?	Potential for improvement
Facilitates removal of blockages and identification of trends (pages 33-34)	The MACE arrangements are able to remove blockages or obstacles in responding to risk and vulnerability
Enables escalation of difficulties to more senior managers who	The MACE arrangements provide for escalation so that individuals and agencies can raise and address concerns

can resolve them (page 33-34)		
Peer review / self-assessment		Potential for improvement
Liaison across local authority and BCU boundaries (page 28)	The MACE arrangements provide for effective coordination and liaison when children at risk of exploitation move between local authority areas, ensuring that responsibilities are clear	
What is working well?		Potential for improvement
Coordination with adult services to ensure transitions (page 35)	The MACE arrangements enable support to be provided to vulnerable adults aged 18-25	
What is working well?		Potential for improvement

Topic 2 - Pre-MACE activity safeguards children	
Pre-MACE activity (pages 33-34)	<p>The MACE arrangements ensure that all potential exploitation cases have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • followed existing child protection procedures prior to being discussed at the meeting • been the subject of a strategy meeting / discussion and • a corresponding police child exploitation crime report number for the child
	Professionals working with children at risk of exploitation know when and how to refer children to the MACE and pre-MACE meetings
	<p>There is a pre-MACE meeting to ensure that the MACE arrangements run effectively.</p> <p>Pre-MACE meetings are well-attended. They ensure that high-risk cases are escalated to MACE.</p>
What is working well?	Potential for improvement

Topic 3 - The MACE arrangements allow the safeguarding partnership to identify trends in exploitation and to direct resources and activity		
Strategic oversight (page 33)	The MACE arrangements provide oversight of exploitation cases, information, intelligence and activity so that the key themes and trends can be identified	
	The MACE arrangements enable leaders in the safeguarding partnership to understand the effectiveness of activity	
Facilitates identification of trends and direction of resources	The MACE arrangements enable partnerships to respond to short, medium and longer-term themes, trends and patterns.	
What is working well?		Potential for improvement

Topic 4 - MACE leadership, chairing, membership, resourcing, and the coordinator role		
MACE co-ordinator role (pages 33-34)	The MACE has a coordinator who oversees the preparation and circulation of the agenda in advance of MACE meetings	
	The MACE coordinator is responsible for any spreadsheet or tracker used by the local authority to monitor activity, outcomes and trends.	
	The MACE co-ordinator has oversight of escalation arrangements so that individuals and agencies can raise and address concerns.	
What is working well?		Potential for improvement
Leadership and chairing (pages 33-34)	Responsibility for chairing MACE meetings has been agreed between the local authority and the relevant Police Basic Command Unit. Responsibilities should be held at an appropriately senior level e.g. Detective Chief Inspector or Detective Inspector and by a senior manager from social care such as (Assistant Director Safeguarding and Quality Assurance or a service manager) Chairing of the MACE meetings is effective	
Membership (page 58)	The NHS should provide representatives who can participate in the operational and oversight functions of MACE	
	Education services, schools and FE colleges provide representatives who can participate in operational and oversight functions of MACE	
	Service providers (including voluntary organisations) should provide representatives who can participate in operational and oversight functions of MACE	
What is working well?		Potential for improvement

Topic 5 - Procedures and protocols that support the MACE		
Terms of reference (pages 33-34)	MACE meetings have agreed Terms of Reference.	
	The Terms of Reference set objectives for the MACE and methods of achieving them	
	The Terms of Reference describe the role of statutory and other partners.	
	If the MACE arrangements are not working effectively, the Terms of Reference would be used to hold agencies to account	
What is working well?		Potential for improvement
Service Level Information sharing agreement (pages 33-34)	The MACE arrangements have an agreed framework for sharing, holding and processing information.	
MACE meeting structures its discussions and agenda (pages 33-34)	The MACE arrangements use the VOLT mnemonic <i>Victim (s), Offender(s) / perpetrators/persons of concern, Location(s), Themes</i> to understand exploitation and structure the sharing of information and intelligence. Or an alternative approach is satisfactory.	
Minutes	MACE minutes provide an accessible, accurate means of communicating decisions and actions	
Tracker	Activity is recorded and held on a tracker which is reviewed by the MACE chairs or coordinator at an agreed interval	
What is working well?		Potential for improvement

Topic 6 - Strategic direction of activity to combat exploitation		
Governance (page 35)	The MACE arrangements sit within the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and its role is understood	
	The MACE arrangements have defined relationships to agencies and other partnerships such as the Community Safety Partnership	
Collection and evaluation of data	The MACE arrangements provide a consistent data set to inform the local child exploitation problem profile	
What is working well?		Potential for improvement

Topic 7 – Impact of MACE and other additional observations	
What is the impact of the MACE arrangements on outcomes for individual children and young people?	
What is the impact of MACE on inter-agency working?	
Can these be strengthened?	
Are current arrangements equally effective in relation to different types of child exploitation and extra-familial harm?	
What is working well?	Potential for improvement

Details of local MACE arrangement meetings drawn from self-assessment templates

Circulated as a separate document

Sample authority MACE KPIs (Camden)

Key Indicator		
No. of YP who received a	CSE Risk Assessment	CCE Risk Assessment
No. of Risk assessments	CSE Risk Assessment	CCE Risk Assessment
% of CSE Risk Assessments:	Male	Female
% of CCE Risk Assessments	Male	Female
Number of CSE Rag Ratings:		Number of CCE Rag Ratings:
Red		Red
Amber		Amber
Green		Green
Blue		Blue
CSE Model:		
Peer exploitation		Online exploitation
Inappropriate relationship		Organised exploitation
CCE Type:		
Exploitation through gangs/Youth Violence:		
County Lines		
Decrease in risk score for		
CSE Risk Assessments		
CCE Risk Assessments		
Number of disruption activities:		
1. Operations		4. Letters of concern
2. CAWNs		5. Prosecution of perpetrator
3. Arrests		6. Other (please detail)
Number of children referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)**		
% young people discussed at MACE to have a bespoke safety plan		
10% reduction in missing episodes for the young people discussed at MACE		
Total number of RHIs shown as a percentage of all missing reports		
Outcome measure: Total % reduction in missing/absent episodes after successful return home interview in previous quarter		