

Title: West Mercia Police responses to Herefordshire Council Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee lines of enquiry.

Committee: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Meeting date: 27 May 2025
Topic: Child exploitation

- **What is the extent and profile of the different types of exploitation in Herefordshire?**

The Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) profile for West Mercia has been completed and published on 10th April 2025.

The profile is completed in line with National Police Chief's Council and Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce methodology and standardised template.

This profile evaluates Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) within the West Mercia force area over the 12-month period between 01/03/2024 and 28/03/2025

Data uncertainty

There is not yet a specifically recordable offence of CSE or CCE (Child Criminal Exploitation). The Department for Education, 2023, Working Together to Safeguard Children has been used to identify recorded CSE offences.

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

Findings

The profile concluded that child sexual exploitation is at a relatively low level on the West Mercia force area.

There were no incidents linked to group-based child sexual exploitation identified and there are no current operations running concerning CSE in the force area.

Only one offence of CSE was recorded in Herefordshire during this time period. This relates to an offence committed online.

There were no repeat victims in Herefordshire in this time period.

There were no specific groups of individuals or associates identified as being targeted for CSE, such as groups of pupils in the same school, or young people attending a social group.

Youths who regularly go missing are likely to have the vulnerabilities which make them targets for perpetrators who want to sexually exploit them, such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). There were no victims of CSE in Herefordshire in this time period who had been recorded as missing persons.

There were no repeat perpetrators identified in Herefordshire over the 12-month period analysed. Their six offences are based on two events involving three victims in each.

There were three offences which involved a perpetrator who was in a position of trust and had educational links. None of these were in Herefordshire.

There were no cases where it was evident that the individual involved had progressed from being a victim to a perpetrator.

Group based CSE

Analysis of each individual CSE offence shows that there were no incidents which were deemed to be committed by a group of two or more offenders.

At the date of publish, there are currently no CSE organised crime groups mapped on West Mercia and no ongoing operations concerning CSE.

• What plans and strategies exist to tackle different forms of exploitation?

West Mercia Police are committed to working along with other agencies to safeguard children.

We aim when policing child abuse to ensure that the welfare of children is paramount.

- We investigate all reports of child abuse and neglect and protect the rights of child victims of crime.
- We seek to take effective action against offenders so that they can be held accountable, through the criminal justice system, while safeguarding the welfare of the child.
- We adopt a proactive multi-agency approach to preventing and reducing child abuse and neglect and safeguarding children.

Child Protection and investigation of crimes against children is the responsibility of all officers and we have a number of dedicated teams of officers and staff investigating child sexual exploitation.

We also have dedicated teams of detectives working with children's social care to investigate crimes against children within the home.

West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner John Campion holds Chief Constable Richard Cooper to account for tackling CSE. Assurance and Accountability minutes are published online.

- **How do partners work together to tackle different types of exploitation**

There is a wide variety of CSE provision available across the West Mercia force, this includes Office of Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) funded provision, police resources, local authority resources such as the Safe Team, schools and local charities. Two of these provisions are dedicated to dealing with CSE, Branch and The Holly Project. Many of these services deal with multiple forms of exploitation and more generally with victims of crime.

Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Provision

- Primary provision is focussed on the prevention of CSE occurring and includes parental input, age-appropriate education, identification of at risk individuals and open channels of communication.
- Secondary Provision emphasis on early intervention of the emerging issue to resolve it, with targeted intervention and protective work with those who have known vulnerabilities.
- Tertiary provision is aimed at those affected by CSE to manage the ongoing situation and prevent further abuse.

Safe Team – Herefordshire

The team deal with all risk levels (significant, moderate and emerging) and give support based on the level of risk. Emerging risk will receive preventative work/early help. Moderate and significant risk will have a Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meeting chaired by the Local Authority where a safety plan will be developed.

The provision offers support to children and young people (CYP) who have experienced CSE (including online) and adult victims of historic CSE



Victim Support are an independent charity that offer help to people affected by crime. Whilst they do not work specifically with CYP affected by CSE they may work with adults that have disclosed historic CSE.



Supporting children aged 8-18 and young people up to the age of 24 with additional needs, who are impacted by Child Criminal Exploitation or Child Sexual Exploitation.



Branch is for CYP between age 5-18 years, or under the age of 24 years for those with additional needs, who are victims and/or at risk of CSE. The CYP does not have to have formally reported/disclosed CSE.



Purple Leaf is the early intervention and prevention arm of West Mercia Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (WMRSASC). They provide training and education on sexual violence to schools and professionals. Purple Leaf provide psychosocial education in schools to children and young people between age 5-18 years who are at risk of, or experiencing, CSE.



Axis counselling service offers support for women, men, CYP (aged 11+years) who have experienced non-recent (historic) childhood sexual abuse, any form of sexual assault, sexual violence, sexual exploitation or rape.



Are you worried about online sexual abuse or the way someone has been communicating with you online?

[Make a report](#) to one of CEOP's Child Protection Advisors

Further Local Provisions – Non OPCC Funded. There are also a wide range of other provision in place including The Holly Project, Street Pastors, Taxi Marshalls, Early Help, and Maris Collins Foundation.

- **What training and awareness raising takes place?**

The Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership provides full information on its web site. Age-appropriate information for children and young people about exploitation and support available can be found in the online Youth Hub on the link: [Hub: Exploitation and Crime - Herefordshire Safeguarding Boards and Partnerships](#).

There is a full guide for people affected and to support practitioners to work with them on: [Exploitation Tools and Pathways - Herefordshire Safeguarding Boards and Partnerships](#).

For practitioners

Training delivered to officers and staff on initial recruitment to West Mercia Police

Specialist training delivered to detectives including the Specialist Child Abuse Investigators programme.

The Herefordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership also provides training for all professionals on exploitation relating to children and adults, which is delivered by West Mercia Police.

[Herefordshire Safeguarding Partnership - Learning Management System](#)

For children, young people and families

Our Exploitation and Vulnerability Training workshops are available to anyone living or working in Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin or Worcestershire.

Available both online via Teams and in-person delivery, the workshops aim to cover the various aspects of vulnerability and the signs and symptoms of exploitation.

[Exploitation and vulnerability training | West Mercia Police](#)