

Teeswide Strategic VEMT Partnership



INTRODUCTION

Safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults is everyone's business. This is particularly so when it comes to those who are sexually or criminally exploited, those who go missing and those who are trafficked or subject to modern slavery for whatever purpose. Lives can be and are destroyed and communities damaged as a consequence.

This strategy document sets out the commitment of the Hartlepool & Stockton Safeguarding Children Partnership (HSSCP); the South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership (STSCP) and the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) to undertake all actions possible to tackle these areas of concern. This strategy has been written to support, and be supported by, the Teeswide Safeguarding Procedures. It recognises the critical importance of strong partnership working to protect those who might be at risk, the need to support victims and to disrupt and prosecute suspected offenders.

This strategy is cognisant of the latest learning and understanding to help drive our improvements to practice, knowledge and understanding. It has also incorporated the learning from the VEMT multi-agency development day in March 2020.

A refreshed multi-agency Strategic VEMT action plan has been developed to support the four thematic key priorities. The objectives of the VEMT strategic meeting will be to monitor the progress of the plan and seek assurance that work is being completed across the Tees to protect children, young people and adults at risk from harm.

Teeswide overarching guiding principles

The overriding principles that will guide our approach to preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation and trafficking across Teesside will be that:

- All children, young people and some adults are vulnerable to exploitation, not just specific groups.
- The needs and safety of children, young people and vulnerable adults must come first. Well-trained practitioners need to respond to the range of risks they face and 'stay with' the individual.
- Intelligence sharing across agencies is fundamental to enable professionals to recognise, understand and respond to the risks of exploitation to children, young people and adults at risk.
- Agencies will learn from and build on, successful multi-agency work to respond to sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation whilst also developing best practice on wider exploitation.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Criminal exploitation is a form of modern slavery that sees victims being forced to work under the control of highly organised criminals in activities such as forced begging, shoplifting and pickpocketing, cannabis cultivation, drug dealing and financial exploitation.

Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child, young person or vulnerable adult. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or another form of “deal line”. They are likely to exploit children, young people and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.”

County lines activities and the associated violence, drug dealing and exploitation have a devastating impact on children, young people and vulnerable adults as well as families and local communities.

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child, young person or vulnerable adult 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. Sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

Violence, coercion and intimidation are common. Involvement in exploitative relationships is characterised by the limited availability of choice for the child, young person or adult at risk, as a result of their social, economic or emotional vulnerability. A common feature of sexual exploitation is that the victim does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation.

Modern Slavery is a serious crime being committed across the UK in which victims are exploited for someone else’s gain. It can take many forms including trafficking of people, forced labour and servitude. Victims are often hidden away, may be unable to leave their situation, or may not come forward because of fear or shame.

Human trafficking is the movement of people by means such as force, fraud, coercion or deception, with the aim of exploiting them. It is a form of modern slavery. Human trafficking is a crime and does not always involve international transportation; trafficking in the UK includes commercial, sexual and bonded labour¹.

¹ **Bonded labour**, also known as debt bondage, happens when people give themselves into slavery as security against a loan or when they inherit a debt from a relative.

STRATEGIC THEMES

To drive and improve practice, knowledge and understanding around identifying and responding to the exploitation of children, young people and adults, the Teeswide VEMT strategy will focus on the following key areas of planned activity:

1: IMPROVING CONTEXTUAL SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE

OBJECTIVE	Work across Tees to develop contextual safeguarding arrangements with an emphasis on effective intelligence sharing and response.
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There is a need to develop local partnership arrangements to use intelligence to understand and respond to risk. Across the region, partners must link strategically and operationally to effectively protect children, young people and adults at risk who may be sexually or criminally exploited or trafficked to sell drugs. Lessons learnt from national good practice will serve to improve the multi-agency response to exploitation across Teesside.

It is critically important to have effective systems for collating and sharing information, both strategically and in response to individual children, young people and adults at risk. Sharing intelligence and information is crucial when developing multi-agency approaches to preventing criminal exploitation.

If a child, young person or adult at risk goes missing from, for example, an urban area and the police find them in a seaside resort in another county in possession of Class A drugs, there needs to be good communication and information-sharing between the police and children's social care / adult social care in both areas. This will support planning to protect the individual, help to identify any other vulnerable individuals in need of protection and support any criminal investigation.

2. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

OBJECTIVE	Develop a communication plan for professionals, the public and individuals of all ages who may be at risk of exploitation.
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There is a fundamental need to support and protect victims by raising awareness of sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, county lines and modern slavery across Teesside to address the harm caused by perpetrators. This requires a multi-agency coordinated approach to awareness-raising with professionals and the wider community to include children, young people, parents and adults at risk to maximise the disruption and prevention of those perpetrating exploitation. This requires engagement across a wide range of agencies including children's and adults' social care, police, probation services, youth offending teams, health, education, housing, transport, community safety, the local safeguarding partners, local businesses and voluntary organisations.

3. TRAINING

OBJECTIVE	Ensure professionals who work with children, young people and adults at risk are well trained, skilled and competent.
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Professionals must be well trained, skilled and competent to respond to the threat of exploitation. Working with children, young people and adults at high risk of exploitation and who are reluctant to engage can be challenging; they need professionals who are well trained, skilled and persistent and who recognise the risks.

4. TRANSITIONS

OBJECTIVE	Improve transitional arrangements for when a young person becomes an adult.
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There is a need to improve transitional arrangements for vulnerable children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation as they become adults. We need to change how we see and understand vulnerable young people. Agencies working across Teesside acknowledge there is a need to do more to recognise the complexity of some young people's lives. The behaviours that young people present with, such as offending or violence, may result from exploitation outside the home and/or from abuse at home. Any interventions need to take into account all risks and needs. We must all understand that children and young people who have been criminally exploited are the victims of crime.

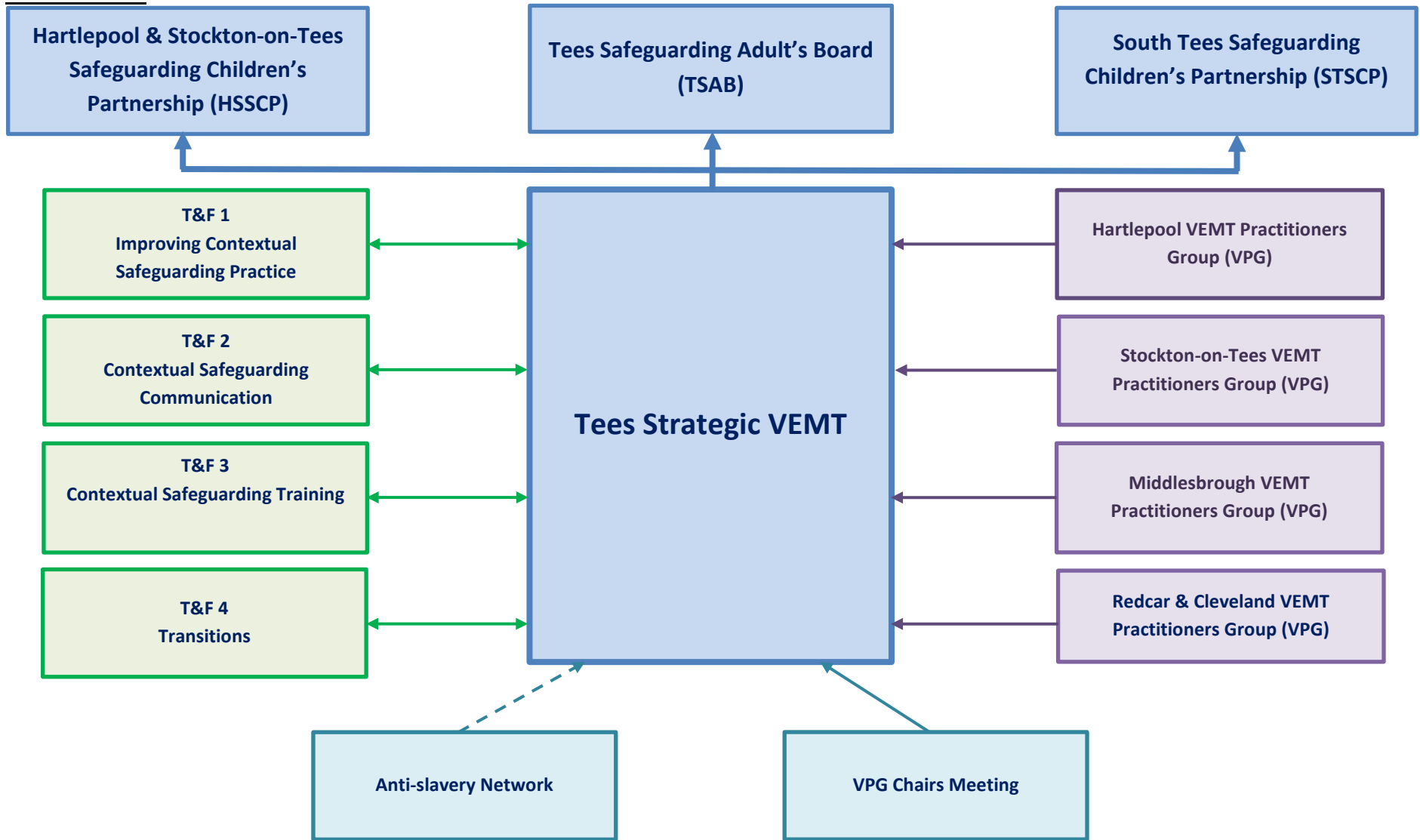
All agencies working with young people who then transition to adulthood need to understand how behaviours, such as offending behaviour, should be seen in the wider context of other vulnerabilities such as criminal and sexual exploitation. Unless agencies understand the context of the young person's behaviour as well as the impact (for example, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mental health issues or substance misuse), it will not be possible for multi-agency partners to respond effectively. This means that they cannot meet the young person's needs nor prevent future risk and abuse. This is particularly relevant for young people exploited through county lines activity.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

It was agreed by the Strategic VEMT members at a consultation 16 October 2020 that there would be a series of Task & Finish Groups, each with a specific focus on a key objective as defined within this strategy document; this structure is defined within Appendix 1 and provides the basis of the governance arrangements to support the effective work of the Teeswide Strategic VEMT Partnership Meeting.

The strategic VEMT action plan will be updated and the format revised to reflect the agreed strategy and governance arrangements.

APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2: Terms of Reference for Teeswide Strategic VEMT Partnership Meeting

Name of Meeting	Teeswide Strategic VEMT Partnership Meeting
<p>Membership</p> <p>Members must have an appropriate level of expertise and seniority to contribute effectively to the work of the Strategic VEMT Partnership Meeting.</p>	<p>The meeting will be inclusive of safeguarding partners:</p> <p>Cleveland Police (Chair) + CET police representative Deputy/Assistant Director of CSC for each of the 4 Tees Local Authorities Tees PMF Business Partner VPG Chair for each of the 4 Tees Local Authorities NHS Tees Valley CCG Designated Nurse TSAB Business Manager HSSCP Business Manager STSCP Business Manager Tees Esk & Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust North Tees & Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust Police & Crime Commissioners Office Representative(s) Tees Anti-slavery Network Representative Harrogate & District NHS Foundation Trust (0-19 Service) Arch North East Barnardo's Tees Valley Sixth Form College Representative</p> <p>STSCP Administrator (minute taker)</p>
<p>Quoracy (minimum of 6 representatives)</p>	<p>Chair (or Deputy Chair) plus a minimum of at least 3 other representatives from the membership as defined above.</p> <p>Group members are expected to attend at least 4 meetings per year and to take full responsibility for progressing actions within agreed timescales.</p>
<p>Frequency</p>	<p>Meetings to be held bi-monthly for up to 3 hours.</p> <p>The draft minutes of the meeting will be circulated within 14 days of the meeting taking place.</p> <p>Agendas and associated documents will be sent out a minimum of 5 working days in advance of the meeting.</p>

Core Purpose	<p>The purpose of the Strategic VEMT Partnership Meeting is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide assurance to the Tees Children’s Safeguarding Partnerships (HSSCP and STSCP) and the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB) that vulnerable children, young people and adults are appropriately safeguarded. • Improve and develop contextual safeguarding practice across health providers. • Provide a forum for professional challenge. • Ensure clear and regular communication and effective co-ordination of activities between all multi-agency partners across Teesside. Support the implementation of actions arising from the Strategic VEMT action plan in line with national/local guidance. • Consider Local and National Policies and Guidance; statutory changes in regulatory or assurance frameworks and best practice to understand implications for the all multi-agency partners. <p>All papers are <u>confidential</u> unless otherwise stated. Papers cannot be shared outside of the meeting without express permission of the author / chair.</p>
Specific Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop a VEMT strategy and to ensure partners within each local authority are effectively meeting the needs of their local population in respect of criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, contextual safeguarding and individuals who are trafficked or victims of modern slavery. • Plan for and facilitate local implementation of national policy and guidelines related to contextual safeguarding • To develop and monitor a strategic VEMT action plan.

Completed by	
Approved by:	Date:
Date for review:	Annually