

EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

– 22 September 2026

HARM OUTSIDE THE HOME AND CHILD SEX EXPLOITATION

Report by Director of Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) note the contents of the report, its performance focus and future priorities for the year ahead.

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire has strengthened its response to harm outside the home through an integrated, multi-agency model combining early identification, specialist safeguarding, youth support, diversion and disruption. Over 2025/26, first-time entrants to the justice system fell by 53%, targeted youth services engaged 2,194 young people, and 94% of children referred to Family Bridges because of family breakdown had not entered local authority care by April 2026. The next phase will embed consistent ROTH pathways, strengthen education and SEND safeguarding, target prevention through shared intelligence, and improve evidence of outcomes.

Purpose and Background

3. Oxfordshire's current approach to exploitation and Harm Outside the Home is rooted in the learning from Operation Bullfinch and the subsequent development of the specialist Kingfisher model, which strengthened multi-agency identification, information sharing, disruption and support for children at risk of sexual exploitation.
4. This foundation has now been expanded through the integrated Adolescence and Prevention Service, recognising that adolescent risk is increasingly interconnected and may include criminal exploitation, serious youth violence, missing episodes, online harm, harmful peer relationships, school absence, SEND and trauma. The service brings together early help, specialist safeguarding, youth justice, prevention and disruption activity to support earlier identification, trusted relationships, coordinated intervention and stronger partnership oversight.

5. This report sets out the current picture of child exploitation and Harm Outside the Home in Oxfordshire, reviews partnership activity and impact over the past 12 months, and identifies priorities for further improvement. It aligns with national learning, including Baroness Casey's 2025 audit, by emphasising improved data, accountability, multi-agency working and consistently child-centred, trauma-informed practice.

Priorities and Delivery Focus

6. Over the next 12 months, Oxfordshire will focus on embedding a consistent Risk Outside the Home pathway, strengthening multi-agency assurance and disruption, and using shared safeguarding, police, missing and education data to target prevention earlier. Delivery will also prioritise effective modern-slavery responses, coordinated diversion for children at escalating risk, stronger education and SEND safeguarding, and ensuring children's voices shape safety planning. Improved performance monitoring and quarterly review will evidence whether these measures are making children safer and reducing escalation.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

7. The report supports the Council's strategic priorities to tackle inequalities, prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents, and create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential. It aligns with the council's wider ambitions for prevention, partnership working, community safety, improved educational inclusion, SEND improvement and better life chances for vulnerable children and young people.

Financial Implications

8. There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Legal Implications

9. The Government through the Department for Education has issued Guidance regarding "*Child Sexual Exploitation - Definition and a guide for practitioners, local leaders and decision makers working to protect children from child sexual exploitation*" dated February 2017. This non-statutory guidance has been produced to help practitioners, local leaders and decision makers who work with children and families to identify child sexual exploitation and take appropriate action in response. This includes the management, disruption and prosecution of perpetrators.
10. This advice should be read alongside Working Together to Safeguard Children (most recent updates available on gov.uk) which provide statutory guidance covering the legislative requirements on services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, including in relation to child sexual exploitation.

11. Local authorities have overarching responsibility for safeguarding all children in their area. Their statutory functions under the 1989 and 2004 Children Act(s) include specific duties in relation to children in need and children suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm (under sections 17 and 47 of the Children Act 1989).
12. Local agencies, including the police and health services, also have a duty under section 11 of the Children Act 2004 to ensure they consider the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people when carrying out their functions.
13. Section 10 of the Children Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to cooperate with agencies to promote the wellbeing of children and young people in each local authority area.
14. Section 17 of The Children Act 1989 places a general duty on local authorities to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in need in their area by providing a range of services appropriate to those children's needs.

Staff Implications

15. There are no current staffing implications associated with the report teams mentioned. Any future staffing changes arising from service development would be managed through the Council's normal workforce processes and governance arrangements.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

16. Equality and inclusion are central to the way we work with adolescents, their families, partners and communities. We are live to overrepresentation and disproportionality, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice, and improving outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The partnership will continue to use data, quality assurance and community insight to identify and address unequal outcomes for children from minoritised and over-represented groups.

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

17. Local Government Reorganisation presents both opportunities and risks for Oxfordshire's approach to Harm Outside the Home and exploitation. The move to three unitary councils could enable stronger local alignment with communities, schools, district-based partners and neighbourhood responses; however, there is a significant risk that current countywide safeguarding arrangements become fragmented when Oxfordshire County Council ceases to operate from April 2028. Given that HOTH and exploitation are not confined by council boundaries and require a contextual safeguarding response across schools, public spaces, online environments, communities and partner

agencies, it will be essential to preserve a consistent countywide framework while adapting governance, commissioning and operational accountability to the new structures. This should include shared data and intelligence, stable multi-agency pathways, clear escalation routes, continuity of specialist expertise and equitable access to early intervention, so that children receive a consistent and effective response regardless of where they live. To mitigate, we will continue to work closely with partners, share information and follow an aligned footprint across Youth Partnerships, Family Hubs and SEND reform school clusters.

Sustainability Implications

18. This plan has no direct material sustainability or climate implications. Where actions arising from the work taking place and any future commissioning, or programme development with material environmental impact, these will be considered through the Council's usual climate and sustainability assessment processes.

Risk Management

19. The main risks are maintaining clear ownership of countywide pathways during local government reorganisation, sustaining partnership accountability, sharing information and outcome data effectively as well as protecting specialist capacity, targeting support through local risk data, and checking that integrated adolescent responses are keeping children safer and reducing exploitation.

Consultations

20. This report has been developed with input from Oxfordshire's Harm Reduction Unit and used data from performance sources across agencies.

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Annex: Harm Outside The Home and Exploitation Annual Report

Background papers: Nil

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August 2026