

# Safeguarding Futures



## Newsletter

October 2024



### Welcome

Welcome to the inaugural issue of "Safeguarding Futures," a newsletter dedicated to keeping you informed about our crucial project to enhance child protection measures against criminal exploitation.

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) is an urgent and complex issue facing our community. Young lives are at risk as criminal networks target vulnerable children for illegal activities. Our project aims to create a more robust, coordinated, and effective response to this challenge.

Over the coming months, we'll be implementing a comprehensive action plan developed in collaboration with law enforcement, social services, education providers, and community organizations.

This newsletter will provide regular updates on our progress,



spotlight success stories, and share insights from experts in the field. We'll also highlight opportunities for stakeholder involvement and feedback.

By working together, we can create a safer environment for our children and disrupt the cycles of exploitation. Thank you for your commitment to this vital cause.

**Bernie McNally**  
**Independent Chair,**  
**Safeguarding Board of Northern**  
**Ireland**

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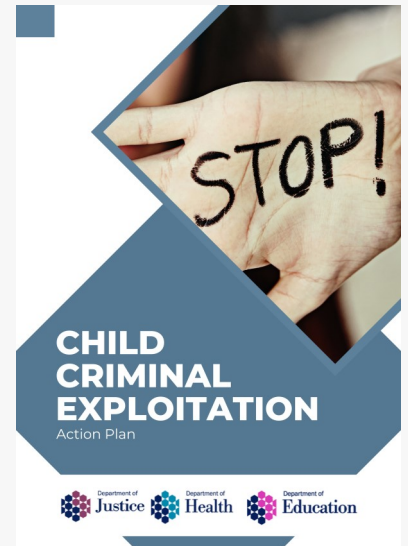
# Launch of the Action Plan by the Ministers of Health, Justice, and Education

On 30th September, the Ministers for Health, Justice and Education launched the Child Criminal Exploitation Action Plan. You can find a copy of the action plan [here](#).

The Plan is a cross-departmental, multi-agency plan to improve the response

to the criminal exploitation of young people and to embed this within the child protection system.

The plan is underpinned by an agreed definition of CCE, which was developed jointly with children and young people.



(L-R) Minister for Education, Paul Givan, Minister for Justice, Naomi Long, and Health Minister, Mike Nesbitt, launch the action plan

"The exploitation of children for criminal purposes may seem like a shocking concept and one which could not happen in a modern progressive society. And yet this is happening every day in Northern Ireland.

"This cross-departmental action plan enables us to implement measures to prevent the criminal exploitation of children and young people and to ensure an effective response when exploitation does occur. We need to ensure that children and young people who are criminally exploited are recognised as victims and supported rather than criminalised."

**Naomi Long**  
**Minister of Justice**

"Supporting and protecting our young people at risk of criminal exploitation or being exploited requires a whole-society response. This plan demonstrates a cross-Executive determination to tackle this important issue.

"The action plan includes commitments to develop training and guidance for professionals, risk assessment tools, agreed pathways into support services and resources and awareness raising programmes for young people and their parents and carers.

"This is the start of a process which will build capacity among safeguarding professionals to support our children and young people."

**Mike Nesbitt**

"Education has a key role in supporting young people at risk of, or being harmed by, criminal exploitation. Our teachers, classroom assistants and youth workers are uniquely placed to build trusted relationships with those at risk, identifying issues of concern and delivering positive interventions. However, they cannot do it alone. The aim is to create a multi-agency, cross-sectoral response which ensures that our young people can thrive. The development of a specific definition of Child Criminal Exploitation, that can be incorporated into policies and procedures, is an important first step."

**Paul Given**  
**Minister of Education**



The background of the entire page is a dark, moody photograph. It shows a person from the chest up, wearing a dark hoodie with the hood pulled over their head, completely obscuring their face. They are standing in front of a brick wall. Above the person's head, centered, is a single, bright, oval-shaped light source, possibly a window or a light fixture, which casts a soft glow on the wall and the person's hood. The overall atmosphere is somber and mysterious.

# **What is Child Criminal Exploitation?**

The following definition was developed by the multi-agency task and finish group and will be incorporated into guidance and policies as the project progresses.

Child criminal exploitation is a form of child abuse which occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity. The exploitation may be through violence or the threat of violence but may also appear to be transactional and in the context of perceived relationships and friendships. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears to be consensual.

Child criminal exploitation does not always involve physical contact. It can also occur through the use of technology and social media.

The criminal exploitation of children and young people can include being exploited into storing drugs or weapons, drug dealing, theft, violence, intimidation, vandalism, forced labour and other forms of criminality through grooming by people that children and young people trust or look up to"

# The Child Criminal Exploitation Action Plan

## What is the Action Plan?

The Departments of Health, Justice and Education have developed a 2-year action plan in collaboration with multi-agency stakeholders to address Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) in Northern Ireland to:

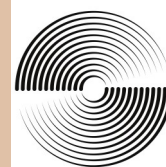
- Increase awareness to create a shared understanding of child criminal exploitation as child abuse;
- prevent the criminal exploitation of children and young people;
- ensure that there is an effective protection and intervention response when exploitation occurs; and
- pursue and bring to justice those responsible for exploiting young people, making the best use of existing legislative powers.

## Where are we now?

A co-ordinator has been appointed to the SBNI, who will lead on and facilitate the delivery and completion of actions through working in partnership with members of the SBNI's Child Exploitation Committee, government departments and other agencies.

Over November and December there will be multi-agency workshops to discuss key concepts and documentation.

The CCE action plan builds on the work in place under the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EPPOC) to provide support to young people vulnerable to criminal exploitation and paramilitary harm.



**The Executive  
Programme on  
Paramilitarism &  
Organised Crime**

## What are the key actions?

The Action Plan includes commitments to develop:

- trauma-informed training and guidance for professionals including risk assessment tools;
- data to create a shared understanding of the nature and scale of CCE in NI;
- clear child protection pathways for professionals and members of the public to make referrals for children and young people who they believe are at risk of or are being exploited; and
- resources and awareness raising programmes for young people, their parents and carers as well as wider general public.



# Strategic Planning Multi-Agency Workshop

Crumlin Road Gaol 24  
June 2024



In June, members of the SBNI Child Exploitation Committee and representatives from their agencies came together to discuss the action plan, what it meant for them, and how we were going to work together to implement it.

There were discussions on the definition of CCE, what we understood by primary, secondary, and tertiary intervention, multi-agency working, and our existing services and structures.

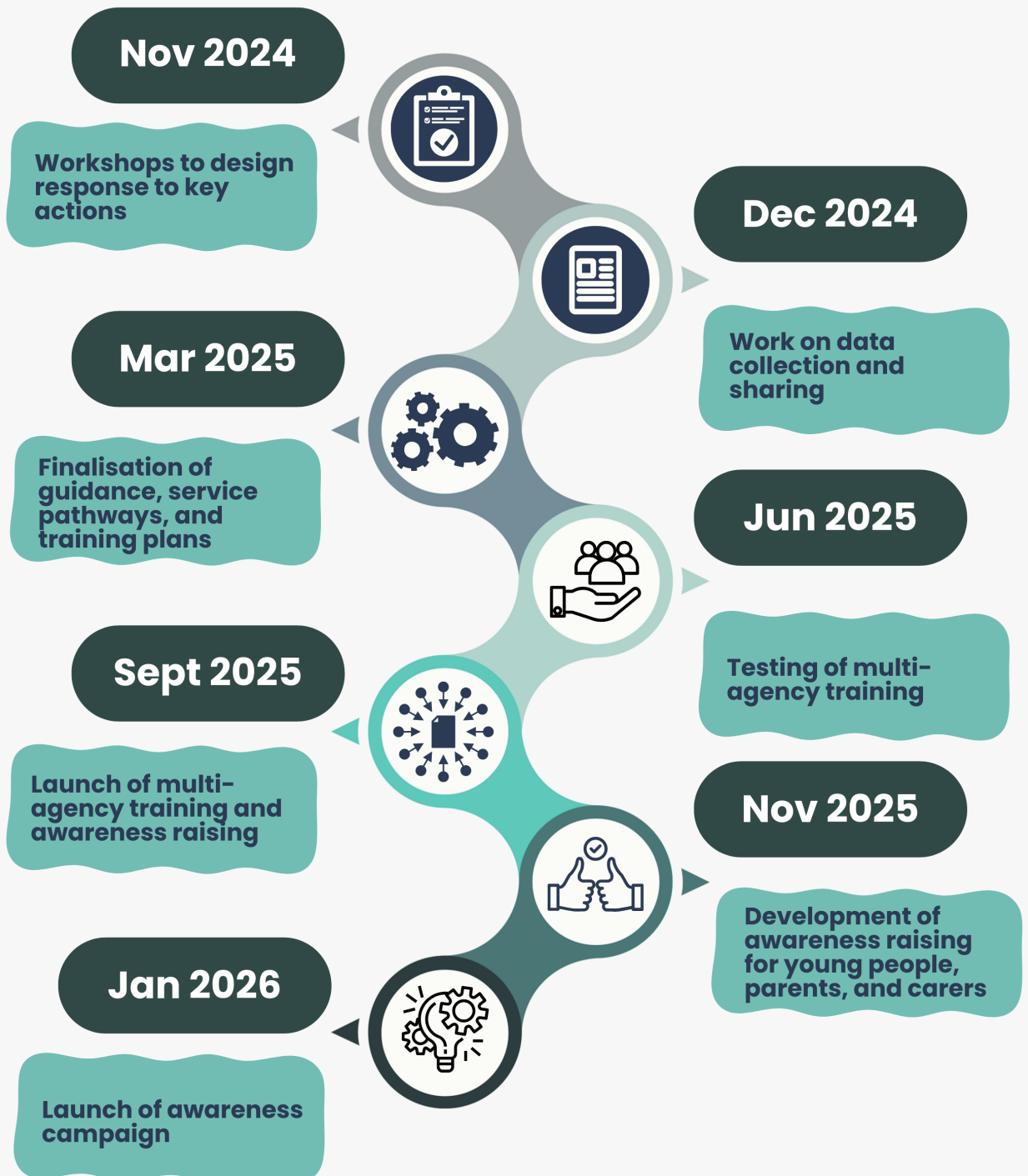


The workshop looked in detail at what kind of system that we wanted to create together.

The workshop has informed the programme management framework which will be used to implement the Action Plan and we will talk about in future newsletters.

# PROJECT TIMELINE

This is an indication of the key steps in the project over the next two years



If you'd like to get in touch to provide feedback, discuss any of the issues raised in this newsletter, or anything else relating to Child Criminal Exploitation, please email us at:

[SBNI.info@hscni.net](mailto:SBNI.info@hscni.net)



**SBNI**  
Safeguarding Board  
for Northern Ireland