

# CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION (CCE) 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.

The CCE action plan also builds on the work already 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. A significant number of actions under the plan will be led by the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) to ensure a trauma-informed multi-agency approach. 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.

## WHAT WILL IT DELIVER?

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.

## A DEFINITION OF CCE

The action plan includes a definition for CCE to assist people to recognise when children and young people are being exploited:

*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”*

## **CHANGING PERCEPTIONS – CCE IS CHILD ABUSE**

As the definition of CCE states, this is a form of child abuse and needs to be recognised as such. A key element of the awareness raising work will be to change perceptions of young people, who are being exploited into becoming involved in illegal activities, as victims, rather than perpetrators. The young people involved are often very vulnerable to exploitation and grooming which criminal/paramilitary gangs prey on, often resulting in the children and young people being criminalised themselves. Too often young people are seen as perpetrators when they actually need care and protection. CCE can also be linked to other forms of exploitation including Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and online grooming.