Standard Operating Procedures

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| **Name of procedure** | **Southend, Essex and Thurrock Standard Operating Procedures for Information Sharing in Respect of Child Exploitation** |

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# Single Point of Contact

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# Purpose of protocol

In line with the agreed ‘WEISF (Whole Essex Information Sharing Framework) Safeguarding Information Sharing Protocol’; <https://www.escb.co.uk/media/2571/weisf-safeguarding-final-v2.doc>, which extends across Southend, Essex and Thurrock, this document sets out the operating protocol for sharing information in relation to ‘*potential’* threats and low level intelligence and concerns relating to child exploitation which may occur across the boundaries of Southend Borough Council, Essex County Council and Thurrock Council. The purpose of this document is to draw your attention to the overall single point of contact (SPOC) for each area and to clearly define how any potential information or intelligence gathered can be shared in each area to support in the building of problem profiles and better understanding around the current picture. It is important to note that any information in relation to concerns for a child and information in relation to safeguarding concerns must follow the ‘SET Child Protection Procedures’ (<https://www.escb.co.uk/media/2086/set-procedures-oct-2019-updated-southend-logo.pdf>). This protocol is agreed as a means of purely complimenting and strengthening the early sharing of information and is not to be considered as a replacement to the Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Child Protection Procedures which must be adhered to in all cases in which there are direct safeguarding concerns in relation to child exploitation.

This protocol is meant as a reference guide within SET and for those other Local Authorities / police forces and organisations outside of SET who have identified potential concerns which will also require the sharing of information across SET in an effort to prevent and deter exploitation.

# Operating Protocol

The protocol agrees 3 levels of information sharing exist in relation to threats concerning child exploitation and sets out clearly below the structures established across Southend, Essex and Thurrock to manage these levels.

## 1. Operational Information Sharing

Any concerns in relation to a child including immediate child protection concerns must follow ‘SET Child Protection Procedures’. The following links detail first point of contact in relation to such concerns dependent on whether they are within Southend, Essex and Thurrock:

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| Southend | <http://www.southend.gov.uk/info/200223/childrens_social_care/277/child_protection> |
| Essex | <https://www.essex.gov.uk/Health-Social-Care/Families-and-childrens-social-care/Protecting-Vulnerable-Children/Pages/Children-at-Risk-of-Abuse-or-Neglect.aspx> |
| Thurrock | <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/what-to-do-if-you-are-worried-about-child/what-to-do-if-you-are-worried-about-child> |

If an offence is thought likely to have been, or is at risk of being, committed (child or adult), Essex Police will be the point of contact. In an emergency situation; if there is an immediate threat to life or safety Essex Police should be contacted on 999.

If an urgent response to a referral is required – but no immediate threat to life or safety: Between the hours of 08:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday: Contact the Triage Team directly by telephone: 101, extn 180022 or 180043. For urgent cases a verbal referral will initially be accepted however it is requested that the original referral be supported by a written referral (see Essex Police Child Information Sharing Form), as soon as the urgency of the situation has been reduced.

Outside of the above hours: Contact the relevant Geographical Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT) via the Essex Police Force Control room, by using the 101 call number. There are six CAIT: Colchester – Chelmsford – Basildon – Southend – Grays & Harlow.

If a non-urgent response to a referral required, it is requested that the referral be in writing using the Essex Police Child Information Sharing Form; <http://www.escb.co.uk/media/2065/partner-information-submission-form.docx>, which must be sent via a secure email address e.g. .gsi/.pnn /.nhs.net.

Email for the Triage Team – [OC.triage.team.essex@essex.pnn.police.uk](mailto:OC.triage.team.essex@essex.pnn.police.uk) via Essex Police Operations Centre Triage Team (OCTT) 101, depending upon the nature, imminence and severity of the concerns, via 999.

Any information which may relate to exploitation of a child can and should be shared with Essex Police. This may be clearly significant in nature; e.g. the name of a suspected abuser or victim, or the make, colour and registration number of a vehicle used by a suspected abuser. In some cases the significance or clarity of the information may be less clear; e.g. a child reporting they have seen a potential victim getting into a blue car on their way home from school or a pattern of unexplained behaviour. Information can be reported via 101 or using the Essex Police Child Information Sharing Form (see link above).

## 2. Potential Information

Southend, Essex and Thurrock have adopted their own internal structures for reviewing and overseeing plans for children at risk of child exploitation, and for collecting data and problem profiles in relation to potential threats, concerns, hot spots and vulnerable locations.

The following structures/mechanisms can be used to share potential intelligence which can:

1. Add to the current picture for an area; or
2. Provide greater understanding about cross border/district & borough threats that through early sharing of information could lead to substantive multi-agency early intervention or preventative activities.

2.1 Essex Missing and Child Exploitation (MACE) Meetings

Part 1 of these meetings run in 4 quadrants across Essex on a monthly basis. Essex MACE meetings provide senior management oversight and review of plans for individual children assessed as high risk or victims of child exploitation and those who are most vulnerable from missing episode(s). Monitors and reviews multi-agency activity and responses to known and potential across Essex County Council including known suspects or perpetrators, groups or gangs. Part 2 of the meeting is run bi-monthly and considers strategic and operational activity necessary to tackle Child Exploitation threats throughout the quadrants through analysing trends, patterns and identifying hot spots and vulnerable locations, considering where possible tactical data and information at a District and City Level.

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| Mid Quadrant | Braintree, Chelmsford & Maldon |
| North Quadrant | Colchester & Tendring |
| West Quadrant | Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow & Uttlesford |
| South Quadrant | Basildon, Castlepoint & Rochford |

The Essex MACE meetings are the channel for the following information shared by partners:

* Establishing exact nature of concerns (e.g. Models of exploitation);
* Identifying potential victims, suspects and perpetrator profiles and vulnerable populations;
* Working with community safety partnerships to utilise governance and regulatory powers to enter premises to investigate possible CE, activities to increase public vigilance, in the pursuit of successful prosecutions and disruption;
* Gathering information regarding links between suspected offenders and movements across areas and out of county;
* Locating and targeting venues/locations identified as hot spots or vulnerable locations;
* Ensuring information is recorded, exchanged and disseminated appropriately within and outside of the Local Authority;
* Providing information to inform problem profiles, building pictures to support the strategic response.

Principal Contact List; <https://www.escb.co.uk/media/2570/mace-principal-contact-list-updated-mid.docx> details names and contact details for all Essex MACE Chairs and their Business Support.

### 2.2 Thurrock:

The journey to address child exploitation in Thurrock is ongoing and is continually evolving. Currently, they have four operational structures that are overseen by the Thurrock Local Safeguarding Childrens Partnership, Community Safety Partnership and the Thurrock Violence and Vulnerability Board. Together, all four forums provide key strategic and operational structures respectively and acts as a mechanism where information is shared between partners in order to:

* Collaboratively, ensure the safeguarding and welfare of children who are missing from home, care or education; trafficked or suspected of being sexually exploited and groomed in the gang or wider exploitative contexts;
* Provide information to inform multi-agency understanding of local problem profiles in relation to locations and perpetrators informing proactive, preventative / safeguarding / protective / disruptive / targeted interventions, and links between them, and possible victims;
* Ensure the timely recording, exchange and dissemination of information within, and outside of the Borough to promote the above two objectives within Thurrock, and more widely.

**Thurrock Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Meetings**

The Thurrock MACE meetings (MACE), sits every six weeks, collating information and data from partners to help to identify developing CE and more widely exploitative concerns across the Borough. These are proactively used to inform collaborative strategic and operational response to safeguard, protect victims and to target, and disrupt with a view to prosecute possible perpetrators.

**Risk Management Meetings:**

The Risk Management Meetings (RMM) reviews the cases of all children who have been reported as missing during the week; those who are assessed to be at high risk of CSE / CE, or those children who are currently being exploited. It hears the cases of children more broadly, assessed at risk of, or being exploited in a wider context, such as trafficking and / or being groomed by gangs

The RMM is a multi-agency forum that provides an opportunity for the group to ensure there is an effective system for professionals with continuing concerns about children who go missing to share information and plan together using a contextual perspective, how to locate them and prevent future missing episodes. It is where each agency are able to review from their own professional perspective for the cases of all children who go missing every week who live in Thurrock, including Other Local Authority Looked After Children placed in Thurrock, and children who are Looked After and placed by Thurrock out of Borough and identify what they can contribute to reduce missing incidents and any risks associated with these. The RMM’s also considers children and young people who remain missing with a view to identifying a plan to locate and safeguard them and to disrupt ‘pull factors’ associated with people, or places of exploitative concern

**Child Exploitation tracker Meetings:**

CSE/CE tracker meetings take place to support social workers and their managers with CSE/CE cases – ensuring strategy meetings, CE Risk & Vulnerability assessments and risk management plans are completed within the required timescale and for the panel to identify any missing areas where contextual safeguarding needs are not being met. The Panel consists of the service and team managers, QA manager, Exploitation Manager and Gangs/CE Lead as well as frontline social workers.

**Gang Related Violence Forums**:

The Gang Related Violence (GRV) forum sits each month, is multi-agency and has oversight of all gang nominals and those that are at risk/being exploited across the borough. It is a forum where sharing of information and active discussions takes place regarding gangs/groups in the area where there are concerns of exploitation and drug lines. Multi-agency plans are then identified and put in place to reduce the risk of harm, manage safety and wellbeing and look at gang exit strategies. This is led by the Youth Offending Service and is a multi-agency task force that discusses both adults and children. Cases are ‘rag’ rated – red are the highest risk or most active, amber are those who are known to have gang links but with no recent intel or are complying with agencies, green are those that are showing emerging signs of gang activity or seen as ‘at risk’ of being exploited. Additionally, there is a ‘blue’ section that are those in custody. They are discussed just prior to release so that the forum can look at identifying licence conditions and if there are any potential risks that may affect others in the borough on their release.

### 2.3 Southend

Southend has recently restructured its strategy in order to address exploitation in its entirety; consequently, there are now three focused forums.  These meetings receive cross board governance from the Southend Safeguarding Children’s Partnership, Community Safety Partnership and the Southend Violence and Vulnerability Board.

**Operation Censor** – is a multi-agency child exploitation forum focused on child criminal exploitation and county lines, operating under SET procedures.  This takes place fortnightly and has a large multi-agency attendance that manages a cohort of children identified through intelligence to be deemed as involved in or at risk of criminal exploitation.  Through the use of data and intelligence pertaining to victims/perpetrators and locations, a multi-agency action plan is undertaken and reviewed.

**Gangs, County Lines, Vulnerability and Exploitation Task Force** – This is a Police-led multi-agency task force held monthly and co-chaired by Police Inspector and Head of Children’s Service’s and those discussed are both adults and children.  The aim of the group is to provide a Multi-Agency response to Urban Street Gangs, County Lines and those at-risk of exploitation and identify vulnerable groups through an information sharing forum. Providing a targeted and structured response to identified issues based on Threat, Harm and Risk.  The objectives of the forum are:

* **Prepare** - Develop partnership protocols on urban street gangs, county lines, exploitation and Cuckooing arrangements, and share information to prevent crime and disorder.
* **Prevent** - Raising awareness amongst professionals and communities on signs of exploitation amongst those that are most vulnerable and seek diversionary options at an early stage and consider throughout.
* **Protect** - To identify victims or those at risk of exploitation to ensure they are safeguarded including where necessary safe accommodation, referrals to support and intervention agencies and use of the National Referral Mechanism. (NRM)
* **Pursue** - To identify perpetrators and take appropriate enforcement action including all Criminal and Civil options available. Explore diversionary options for long term solutions.

**Missing And Sexual Exploitation (MASE) –** This is a multi-agency meeting comprising of a core membership including the LA, Police and Health and takes place every 6 weeks.  This group oversees implementation of the missing action plan, undertakes predictive analysis and pattern mapping of missing episodes that informs future interventions.  They identify young people in the Southend area who are involved in or at high risk of child sexual exploitation and ensure they are effectively managed within formal child protection CIN or LAC processes at the appropriate level.

## 3. Strategic

To support strategic understanding of Pan-Essex problem profiles, patterns of behaviour, reoccurring themes which are triangulated across SET (for example, details of any organised and complex abuse enquiries) or specific patterns of behaviour, profiles and themes which have emerged in one of the SET council areas and have the potential to expand in to other areas the ‘SET CSE Strategic Group’ takes the lead role in considering and sharing such information. The SET CSE Strategic Group is chaired by Essex Police and attended by senior leaders of the three children and families Social Care directorates; three LSCB representatives; and a representative of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.