



Prevention Programme 2023-25

A focused evaluation report

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01

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This focused learning report explores how the Prevention Programme, delivered by The Children's Society and funded by the Home Office, works in England and Wales to prevent child exploitation, and how it has engaged a range of partners to deliver improvements in the support for children and young people at risk from child exploitation.

The report has been written based on information and data shared by The Children's Society, supplemented by interviews and focus groups with members of the Prevention team and a small number of external partners. This report does not represent a full programme evaluation and provides a focused review of aspects of the Programme delivered from 2023-2025.

What the Programme delivers

The Programme, which has been funded by the Home Office since 2019, blends national reach with deep local partnership working, supporting professionals to identify and respond to exploitation through:

- Awareness raising e.g., the #LookCloser campaign: the Programme's most visible strand reaching large audiences.
- Targeted, systems-focused work e.g., in the Night Time Economy (NTE) where multi-agency partners co-designed responses to local safeguarding risks.
- Knowledge mobilisation and learning sessions used to build professional confidence and improve practice.

Delivery is flexible and responsive where many tasks combine multiple approaches reflecting a systems change mindset that recognises the need for multiple touchpoints to influence behaviour and practice.

Key findings

Between April 2023 and March 2025:

- The Programme had an estimated 680,000 first-hand engagements.
- Police are the most commonly engaged sector partners, with over one-third of activity delivered in partnership with police.
- Over 90% of participants in #LookCloser learning sessions said their knowledge and confidence in identifying exploitation has improved.

- The Programme is maturing into a more intentional and strategic model with a stronger focus on systems change: around 60% of the Programme's work has engaged with partners and their systems (e.g., risk profiling, disruption and safeguarding).
- The inclusion of a dedicated youth voice role in the 2023-25 Programme signals a more intentional approach to centering the experiences of young people. It also demonstrates that the Programme sees youth voice as central to improving systems.

Key lessons

- There is now a recognition that building evidence from the work undertaken in the Prevention Programme has strategic value in influencing systems and improving practice. This provides legitimacy for proposed initiatives with partners.
- The design and application of tools such as contextual safeguarding assessments, reflective toolkits and guides helped establish engagement from partners who were better able to understand the scope of the proposed initiative and to commit resources.
- The immersive disruption pilots delivered strong insights for participants, increasing their confidence around child exploitation, and encouraged key partners to reflect on their safeguarding systems and to make improvements.
- The team's ability to provide external challenge and insight is perceived to be having an impact on safeguarding decision-making structures.
- Work in the NTE works best when tailored to the needs of businesses, for example shift patterns and to sector specific safeguarding risks to maximise engagement from commercial businesses.
- The recent two-year funding period (2023-25) has helped improve stability (relative to previous one-year funding periods) but longer-term investment would help to unlock the Programme's full potential.



02

Introduction to this report

2.1 About the Prevention Programme

The Prevention Programme is delivered by The Children's Society and commissioned by the Home Office. Delivering across England and Wales, the Programme aims to tackle child exploitation by supporting professional practice to enable both better identification and improved responses. As of March 2025, the Programme was coming to the end of its sixth year of operation. The Programme has historically been commissioned on an annual basis (every 12 months). The 2023-25 Programme was commissioned for 2 years. For the 2023-25 Programme, 8 priorities were agreed:

1. To work with businesses in the night-time economy to improve their response to child exploitation and abuse.
2. To raise awareness of child exploitation through The Children's Society's #LookCloser Campaign.
3. To embed equity and inclusion in tackling child exploitation and abuse.
4. To develop and deliver a Programme of youth consultation to amplify the voices of young people and inform both the work of the Programme and the wider sector.
5. To embed disruption within safeguarding practice.
6. To support better responses to young people impacted by child exploitation as they transition to adulthood.
7. To identify and respond to emerging and under-recognised forms of child exploitation and the links between exploitation and children going missing.
8. Improve awareness of and responses to child financial exploitation at a national level.

The Prevention Programme is monitored internally by recording the number and type of 'tasks' delivered (a task is defined as a specific piece of work) alongside participant numbers and any feedback received. The Programme also uses two surveys: one for the #LookCloser Programme of Learning, and one for other types of training and learning sessions.

The Programme works at a variety of levels with some fairly 'light touch' engagements (e.g., through comms), 'mid-level' engagements (e.g., through training) and 'depth-level' engagements (e.g., through ongoing work to improve practice and processes). The Programme often co-delivers tasks with a broad mix of partners including police forces, social care teams, specialist third sector organisations, and national organisations such as policing coordination centres and children's charities.

2.2 About this focused evaluation report

In late 2024, The Children's Society appointed SocialQual to conduct a focused evaluation of the 2023-25 Programme. This is not a full Programme evaluation, but an assessment of the Programme based mostly on secondary data collected by the Programme Team supplemented with a deep dive into some elements of the Programme's work on the Night-Time Economy (NTE).

In addition, SocialQual was appointed as a learning partner to develop a forward-looking Pathway (or theory) of Change and accompanying Impact and Learning Framework in addition to this focused evaluation.

This report seeks to respond to 2 key Learning Questions (LQs).

- LQ1. How has the scale, nature and focus of tasks delivered by the Programme evolved over time and what does this tell us about the Programme's emerging impact? (covered in section 3 of the report).
- LQ2. What mechanisms or factors in the Programme's work on the NTE are enabling change and what barriers are limiting its impact? (covered in section 4 of this report).

Details about the methodology, reflections about the approach, its limitations and evaluator reflections can be found in the appendix to this report.

This evaluation focussed on two workstreams – the NTE and the #LookCloser campaign. These areas were given a particular spotlight due to the extent of work carried out by the team and the opportunity to learn from what worked. Spotlights included in this report provide illustrated examples of work and a light-touch analysis of task achievements, critical success factors and remaining challenges. Spotlights are highlighted on light-orange pages.

The insights are presented in the author's (SocialQual) voice and reflect our interpretation of the Programme from the available data.

Further feedback on the risks of short-term funding cycles and delivery risks have been provided separately to this report.

In parallel with this report, a Pathway of Change has been designed with The Children's Society that articulates the Programme's intended medium-term outcomes as well as longer-term impacts. To help the reader orient themselves to the Programme design, this has been included in the appendix.



03

**Scale, nature and focus of
the 2023-25 programme**

3.1 The 2023-25 Prevention Programme in numbers

Task headlines

A total of **730** tasks have been completed

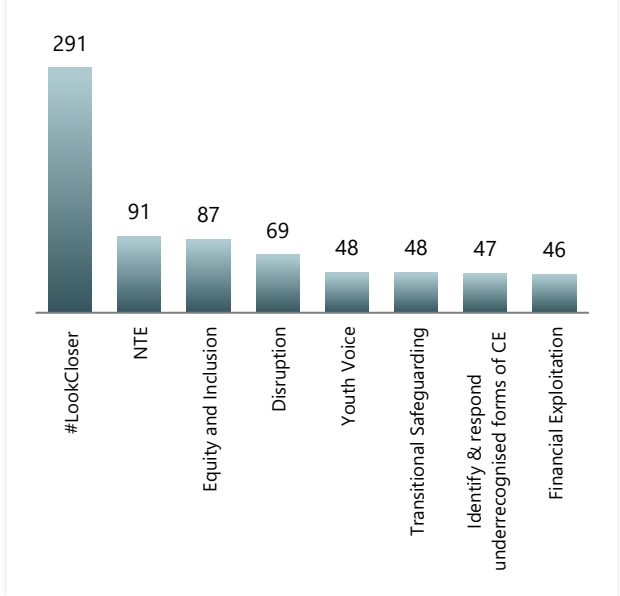
429 (59%) of these tasks were focused on systems change

The Programme defines **systems change** as focusing on collaboratively redesigning the structures, processes and power dynamics that shape young people's lives. Systems change tasks identify opportunities to learn, adapt and innovate.

108 (15%) of tasks worked at a national level.

Priorities

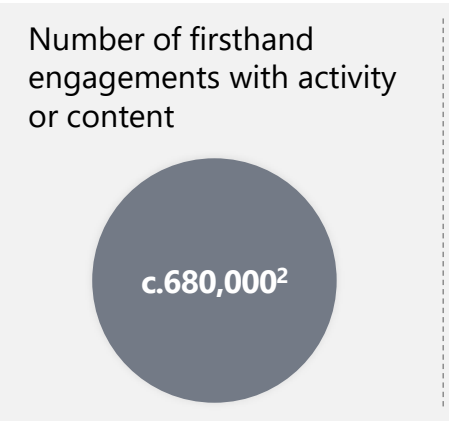
The number of tasks alone does not reflect the scale or depth of activity. Some tasks involved sustained engagement, complex partnership work, and/or significant time investment. However, the number of tasks gives an indication of where the 2023-25 Programme has focused activities.



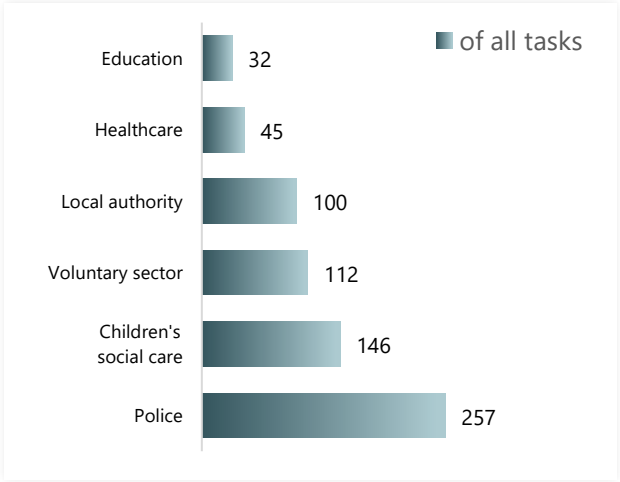
Approaches



- Data suggests high direct reach with police, education, and children's social care
- Taxis and private hire have some large reach (e.g., 245,000 reached through one e-newsletter)³



The Programme has worked in partnership with a range of partners, most commonly:



1. The number of partners corresponds to individuals not organisations. There is significant double counting within Task Log data. For example, the same partners may be involved in multiple tasks but are counted again at each entry; 2. The number of engagements refers to 'audience' numbers: people who engage first-hand with the activity/content and are the primary intended audience; 3. The audience data is difficult to analyse robustly due to inconsistent categorisation and multiple audiences being listed within single entries. This limits the ability to reliably quantify reach by sector or draw firm conclusions about depth of engagement.

3.2 What does the data collected by the team tell us about the 2023-25 Programme delivery?

Systems change is a central focus. The Programme's emphasis on systems change is notable: 59% of all tasks are categorised as systems change by the Prevention Programme at The Children's Society.

Dominant delivery methods are knowledge-based. The nature of approaches frequently used (sharing resources, identifying best practice, insight and learning sessions) reflects a Programme that is primarily focused on knowledge mobilisation, capacity building and influencing practice through professional learning.

The Programme is combining approaches. The team combines multiple approaches within a single task (e.g. action learning, resource sharing and convening within one task). This shows how the Programme's delivery has matured beyond 'single method tasks' into multi-layered and responsive engagements with partners. This fluidity reflects a systems change mindset where influencing behaviour or practice requires multiple touchpoints and approaches.

#LookCloser is the most widely recognised strand, reaching the most people. While task volume alone doesn't capture the depth of impact, #LookCloser appears to be the Programme's primary route to high-volume audience engagement. It is the workstream with the strongest track record of high attendance at events.

Partner engagement is rooted in statutory safeguarding systems. The Programme's core partners are police and children's social care (and have been for several years) with some engagement in education, health and third sectors. Direct partner engagement with businesses and the health sector remains limited and are areas where the team are gaining increasing traction each year.

Growing national recognition. The Programme is securing invitations to national-level advisory and strategic planning groups (e.g. for Ofsted, the Home Office and the National Crime Agency) alongside influencing national guidance. The Prevention team recognises that building national credibility is important for the Programme's future trajectory, both in scaling its influence and in positioning itself as a thought leader.

Building evidence is now seen as a key component of systems change. The Prevention team are gathering and sharing insights. For example, the team dedicates time to conduct literature reviews and consults with relevant specialist community organisations. The Prevention team and external partners feel that this strengthens the strategic position of the Programme.

There are strengths and limitations of the regional delivery model. The Prevention team, since its inception in 2019 has operated through a regional approach where one Prevention Officer is responsible for shaping delivery in a region. Taking a regional approach has enabled the Programme to achieve geographical reach and enables the team to deliver across multiple local contexts. It also allows flexibility to respond to local needs and opportunities. However, the depth of relationship-building is variable across regions. In large regions, the scale makes it difficult for a single officer to sustain deep engagement across multiple localities.

3.3 The evolution of the Prevention Programme

The Programme has evolved over its six-year journey from a delivery-focused model into a more strategic, reflective and systems-oriented Programme. In addition to one-off training sessions, the Programme has taken on a greater range of approaches to working with partners.

Growing confidence to build and share evidence. More recently, evidence-building has been reframed as core to the Programme's mission. There is now a recognition that building evidence has strategic value in influencing systems and improving practice. The team describe this as "something we have grown to prioritise more and more over time".

Evolving methods to match ambition. The Programme's methods have become more diverse and intentional over time. While the early years were training-led, the most recent 2023-25 Programme has expanded into a mix of learning sessions, evidence building and convening. This represents a move beyond awareness-raising towards a more sustained engagement.

Partner pathways through the Programme. While training and campaign materials remain important entry points, the Programme has become more deliberate about building and sustaining relationships with partners. In earlier years, relational work happened alongside delivery and is now recognised as core to the Programme's purpose. The two-year funding cycle of the 2023-25 Programme has enabled the team to invest more time in listening, understanding local needs and tailoring support. Evidence-building plays a strategic role in building credibility, deepening collaboration, and signalling a shared commitment to learning and improvement.

The team has developed a deeper understanding of what works to influence systems and has designed and piloted initiatives to improve multi-agency working. One example is given below that details how the team has focused on disrupting child exploitation.

Disruption

This project began with a literature review that brought together key learning points around disrupting child exploitation which was then followed with a national survey designed by the team and distributed by the team to their safeguarding partners (e.g., Police, social services and third sector). This was followed up with semi-structured interviews with partners.

Findings from this research provided specific insight into gaps in professionals' knowledge and gave the team the legitimacy to move forward with a pilot to test the use of a reflective toolkit. This reflective toolkit was piloted in five local authorities (LA) who brought together key statutory and multi-agency partners including youth justice and the third sector. Each were encouraged to discuss and rate their confidence level as a collective safeguarding body. This work revealed gaps in professionals' skills and knowledge around tactics to disrupt perpetrators, the lack of a clear and consistent processes, and confusion around the language and terminology of disruption.

Significantly it revealed that partners around the table considered disruption to be the responsibility of the police. The team delivered a bespoke report to each group which provided insight into where and how they can improve their systems of support. This work continues with the development of further guidance (2025-2026) and the team were moving to offer local authorities further training to improve their systems of support. From the point of project conception, through to researching, testing and launching the reflective tool, this piece of work to date, has taken almost two years and reveals the importance of building longer-term relationships with partners.

3.4 Inclusion of Youth Voice

Youth voice has an increased focus

The inclusion of a dedicated Youth Voice role in the 2023-25 Programme marks an evolution in the Programme’s approach. While young people’s perspectives have always been valued, this is the first time the Programme has invested directly in capturing young people’s experiences of services and support and reflects a more intentional approach to centering the experiences of young people in their work. It also signals that the Programme sees youth voice as central to improving systems.

“In the early years we probably saw evidence-building as a by-product... something nice to have rather than part of the core offer. But we’ve shifted to seeing it as a key method in itself, both to improve our work and to influence others” (Prevention team).

The Prevention team have moved to a position where they effectively bridge the gap between research drawing on relevant literature and transferring this learning to frontline practice. They are adopting and interpreting broader concepts, generating first-hand experiences and developing a grounded approach to make a difference.

The Publication and Sharing of its first Youth Voice Report

An output from this increased focus on young people’s experiences is the Programme’s first Youth Voice report¹ This report is being shared with the team and is influencing how the team plans their next phases of activity.

The new report has been published based on evidence from consultations with over 300 young people conducted by the Programme’s Youth Voice worker. Young people were asked about their views on how businesses, the general public, and statutory services respond to young people at risk of, or experiencing, child exploitation in a range of settings.

This work has been conducted around the Lundy model² of child participation. The learning from this piece of work is being shared within the team at The Children’s Society and distributed more widely to partners. Young people’s views have been promoted through The Children’s Society social media accounts. Although it was not possible to capture any views from professionals working with young people about the content in the report (due to it being newly released), this consultation was seen as a step change in the Prevention team’s work with young people.

“There has definitely been a significant improvement in ensuring that young people’s voice is included in our delivery...we never want to look at youth voice in silo.” (National Youth Voice worker).

1. See: Everyone has a role to play in preventing child exploitation at <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/information/professionals/resources/everyone-has-a-role-to-play-in-preventing-child-exploitation>

2. See <https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/resources/teaching-resources/guidance-assemblies-lessons/the-lundy-model-article-12-in-practice/>

Spotlight A. Kingston Community Safety Team's experience of working with the Prevention Programme (1)

About this partnership

Over the past three years, the nature of the Programme's work with this London Borough's Community Safety Team has evolved. Initially, the focus was on training sessions to build professionals' understanding of exploitation. Over time, engagement deepened through strategic input, with a Prevention Officer sitting on panels to advise on gaps in safeguarding approaches.

The Team increasingly sought insights from the Programme to inform its own processes and policies, incorporating lessons into risk review frameworks. The introduction of the immersive disruption pilot (see following page for an explanation) represented a shift from traditional training towards experiential learning, enabling professionals to apply safeguarding concepts in realistic scenarios.

Activities delivered

In 2023-25 there have been an estimated 75 firsthand engagements¹ through activities (such as training) or access to content. Examples of activities:

- **Training delivered.** Regular training sessions covering topics such as child exploitation, transitional safeguarding, and support for LGBTQ+ communities.
- **Strategic Collaboration.** The Programme contributed to the borough's transitional safeguarding panel, offering an external perspective on exploitation risks.
- **Immersive Disruption Pilot.** The borough partnered with the Programme on an immersive training initiative aimed at strengthening professionals' ability to recognise and respond to exploitation.
- **Knowledge Sharing.** The Programme provided up-to-date research, insights from other boroughs, and recommendations on best practices.
- **Integration into Local Networks.** The Prevention Officer actively participated in the modern slavery working group and contextual safeguarding discussions.

Spotlight A. Kingston Community Safety Team's experience of working with the Prevention Programme (2)

The immersive disruption pilot in this borough

One of the Programme's most impactful initiatives in this borough was the immersive disruption pilot. This pilot provided real-world simulations, allowing participants to step into various roles and experience decision-making processes firsthand. The borough representative expressed strong enthusiasm for this approach, describing it as an innovative and engaging way to build professionals' confidence in tackling exploitation.

"The immersive training experience was truly unique. It stepped participants out of their typical roles, challenging them to approach safeguarding from fresh perspectives. Feedback from participants was positive, with many describing the session as a valuable learning experience" (Kingston Community Safety Team).

The Programme as a critical friend

The Programme's ability to provide external challenge and insight is perceived to be having an impact on safeguarding decision-making structures. Its role in transitional safeguarding panels and modern slavery working groups has strengthened the borough's ability to take a more holistic and proactive approach to exploitation and risk.

"The Prevention Programme has provided us with a valuable external perspective on our projects. Their input and insights have been instrumental in reviewing our approach and learning from national best practices" (Kingston Community Safety Team).

The need for further support to capture and embed changes

The disruption pilot was well received by participants and seen as a valuable way to prompt reflection and raise awareness. The Community Safety Team acknowledged more generally that while the Programme's contributions have been influential and they have adapted referral processes for at-risk children and young people based on Programme insights, there was no way of tracking whether these changes had led to more young people being identified.

This highlights the importance of continuing to support behaviour change over time while recognizing that some of the Programme's impact may not be immediately visible or measurable.

Spotlight A. Kingston Community Safety Team's experience of working with the Prevention Programme (3)

Emerging outcomes for the Community Safety Team from partnering with Prevention

- **Stronger disruption approaches.** The Community Safety Team now has greater awareness of how disruption can be built into practice.
- **Increased professional confidence.** Training sessions boosted professionals' confidence in identifying and responding to exploitation.
- **Improved awareness of inclusion.** The Programme's insights helped the team to recognise gaps in services for transgender and neurodiverse young people, influencing future support strategies.
- **Improved safeguarding processes.** The borough is applying knowledge gained from the Programme to refine its safeguarding processes and inter-agency collaboration.

Enabling factors

- **Relationships.** The Programme has built strong relationships with the local safeguarding team by maintaining regular contact and actively participating in key panels and meetings. This has enabled a deeper level of trust and engagement.
- **Supportive challenge.** The Programme acts as a critical friend, challenging local safeguarding teams to think beyond their standard practices and consider new approaches.
- **Long term partnership.** The Programme has worked with the borough over several years. It began by delivering training and over time, has become a collaborative partner.

Challenges remain

- Caseworkers often struggle to find time to take part in extensive training and are sometimes unable to take part in more depth or time-consuming offers from the Programme.
- The immersive disruption pilot was highly effective, but replicating it at scale remains a challenge due to resource limitations.

3.5 How #LookCloser is contributing to Programme outcomes (1)

#LookCloser is the national campaign delivered by the Programme with the British Transport Police and National County Lines Coordination Centre. Participants of the sessions delivered as part of #LookCloser’s Programme of Learning have been surveyed shortly after attendance (n=3189). The Programme of Learning offers training on topics relevant to the Programme's core priorities and is open to all professionals.

Results show that the sessions are effective at achieving the four key programme outcomes to a reasonable or great extent for most participants. The four outcomes included:

1. Feeling better prepared to identify signs of exploitation.
2. Improving knowledge.
3. Increased confidence in implementing learning from session into practice.
4. Challenge an assumption or bias in relation to children and young people.

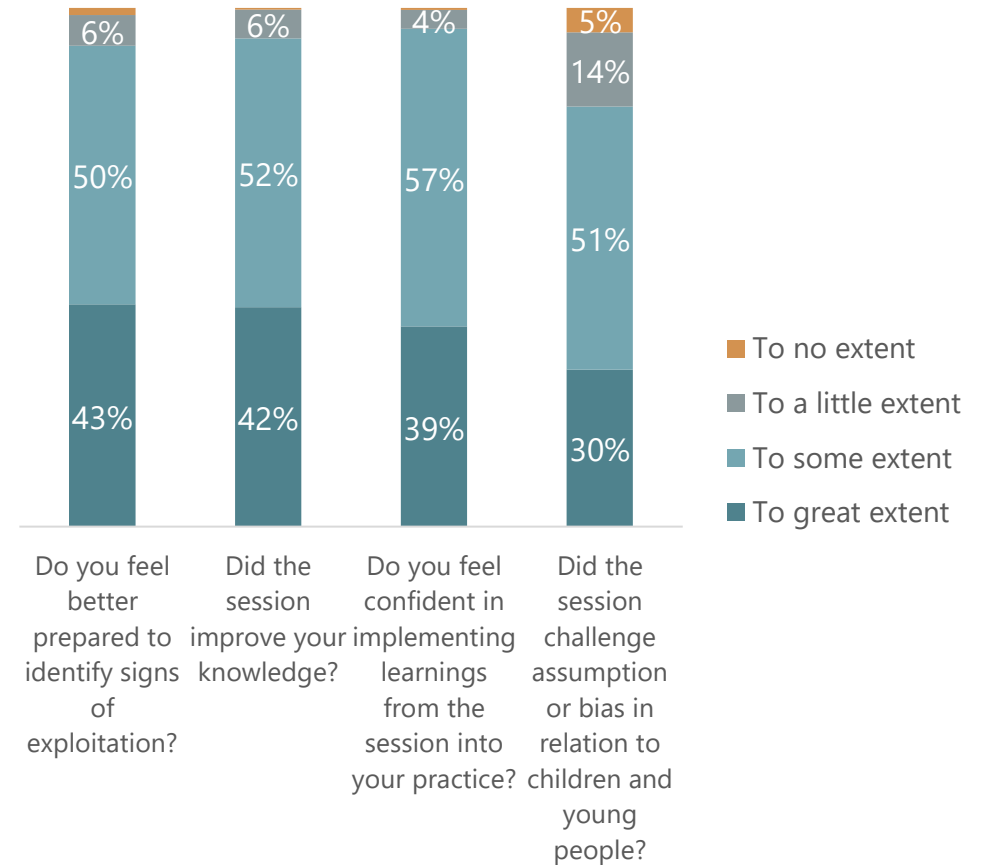
In summary, data shows that:

- 96% of participants feel confident in implementing learning from sessions into practice.
- 94% of participants feel that the sessions improved their knowledge of child exploitation.
- 93% of participants feel better prepared to identify signs of child exploitation.
- 81% of participants felt that the session challenged an assumption or bias in relation to children and young people that they had held.

The sessions that have made the biggest difference across multiple outcomes include:

- Overcoming gender assumptions.
- Safeguarding Transgender young people from exploitation.
- Financial Exploitation.

A more comprehensive list of the sessions delivered and their contributions to outcomes can be found in the Appendix.



3.5 How #LookCloser is contributing to programme outcomes (2)

Based on survey data (n=3189) evidence shows that:

The sessions motivate people to make a change. 89% of participants in #Lookcloser activities intended to make a change to practice following learning from the session.

Participation is likely to influence an increased use of legal tools. A rapid analysis of verbatim survey responses suggests that use of civil orders and changes in language and bias are common intended changes. Several participants noted an increase in awareness of adultification.

Some participants cite systemic barriers to implementing what they learn. Several respondents raised concerns about systems and individual biases that could lead to children not being recognised as victims, including the adultification of young people. They also noted a general lack of understanding of the legal frameworks amongst frontline staff.

Most participants are new to the campaign. 68% of participants had not previously engaged with #LookCloser campaigns or learning sessions. Around a third (32%) had.

Around a third had made changes based on previous campaigns. Of those who had participated in previous #LookCloser campaigns, 35% reported implementing learnings from past sessions into practice. This suggests that while enthusiasm was high, actual implementation over time is likely to be mixed.

Campaign materials are not widely used by session participants. 79% of those who participated in a session had not read or shared campaign materials. Only 21% had.

Changes or developments that participants plan to take forward as a result of a #LookCloser session

"I will make the team more aware of the legislation available especially regarding use of civil orders and NRMs" (Exploitation Project Worker who attended the Disrupting Exploitation session).

"I will be more confident to challenge police about why a juvenile is in custody and how they are being safeguarded" (Independent Custody Advisor who attended the Disrupting Exploitation session).

"Consideration of the adult care act more when children transition into adulthood" (Children's Social Care professionals who attended Transitions to Adulthood session).

Barriers or challenges that participants face in implementing learning from a #LookCloser session

"Other organisations being on board - such as education, social care or the police" (YOS Officer who attended the Anti Racist Practice and Tackling CE session)

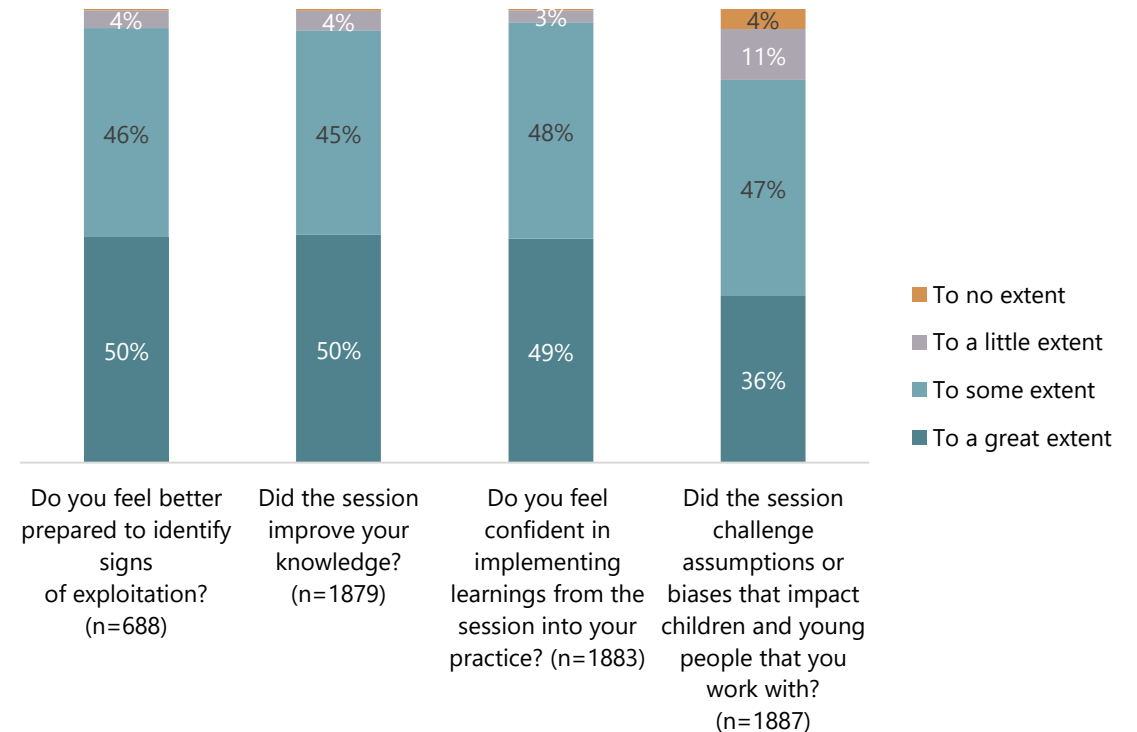
"Police forces are not well versed in correctly identifying child exploitation that is consistent with MSA 2015 offences and do not act on risk indicators. As a result, children remain in harmful and traumatic situations or are dealt with for criminal actions that they have been compelled or convinced into committing. Some policing agencies are organisationally neglectful in keeping children and vulnerable adults safe from this type of harm" (Police MACE coordinator who attended a Modern Slavery Investigations and Child Exploitation session).

"The attitude and culture of the wider workforce and commissioners service limitations. The systems aren't built with trans young people in mind" (Nurse who attended a Safeguarding Transgender Young People from Exploitation session).

3.6 Outcomes from the Prevention Programme's training and learning sessions (1)

Survey data from professionals attending training and learning sessions (not part of #LookCloser¹) highlights the impact on their preparedness to identify child exploitation as well as their knowledge and confidence in applying this in day-to-day practice.

- The range of training delivered to professionals included: Safeguarding care experienced children and young people; girls and exploitation; financial exploitation; language matters; child exploitation workshops for sports clubs; safeguarding transgender young people from exploitation, understanding trans- and non-binary young people's experiences; SEND and exploitation and disrupting exploitation.
- The workforce attending the sessions were drawn from a wide range of sectors including: education, police, children's services, charities, healthcare, children's homes, domestic abuse services, family support and youth work, housing, drug and alcohol services, community mental health, foster care services, and youth justice. Other sectors present but in much smaller numbers included hospitality, the fire service, and the judiciary.
- Attendance at the sessions revealed a good range of personnel were engaged including people in leadership and management roles (detective inspectors, head teachers, head of safeguarding partnership), but with the majority of participants being frontline workers (social workers, family support workers, domestic abuse workers and nurses).
- Analysis shows the positive impact the training had on professionals' immediate knowledge of how to identify exploitation and how to be aware of their own biases and assumptions regarding who may be at risk.
- Responses indicate that most respondents felt that the training had a positive impact on their knowledge and understanding, and over 95% reported an increased confidence in their ability to implement learning into practice.



1. Two similar surveys were disseminated: one focused on #LookCloser Learning Sessions (section 3.5) and the other on all other training and learning sessions (section 3.6). In this report, we have analysed the two datasets separately, as they were structured differently and there was a specific interest in understanding the distinct impact of #LookCloser.

3.6 Outcomes from the Prevention Programme's training and learning sessions (2)

Example of changes or developments in practice to take forward...

- *"I am now more aware of the signs of CSE and CCE in young people and feel more confident in flagging an issue"* (Youth Worker in the Police).
- *"Reminder of professional curiosity, also reminder that males can be victim of sexual abuse"* (Dietician, NHS Trust).
- *"Be more mindful of gender bias and potential exploitation"* (Paediatric Physiotherapist, NHS Trust).

Examples of what people liked /found useful about the sessions...

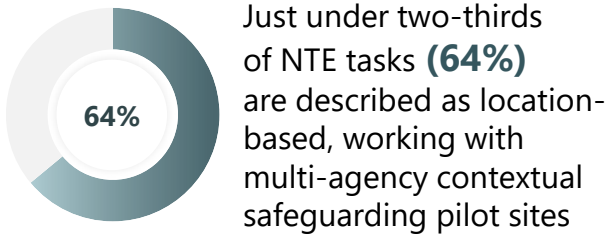
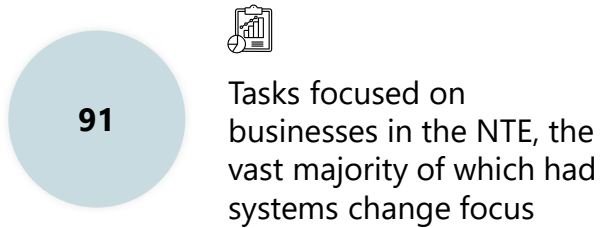
- *"[I liked...] the real accounts to see how this has affected people and how it was dealt with"* (Police Constable).
- *"I liked the adultification bit as there are a lot of children that are the adult in the families due to the roles they have taken on, and we forget that they are only children"* (Domestic Abuse Support Worker).
- *"The pace and depth of explanation in the session was appreciated and expanded my own understanding as someone who is new to support work with YP"* (Support Worker Child Safeguarding).

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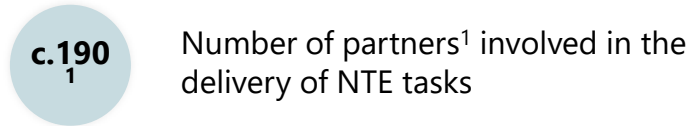
**Learning about the
Programme's work in the
Night Time Economy**

4.1 Overview of Night-Time Economy tasks 2023-25

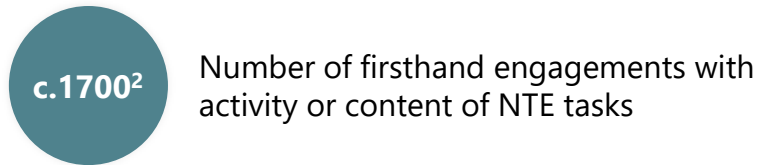
Overview



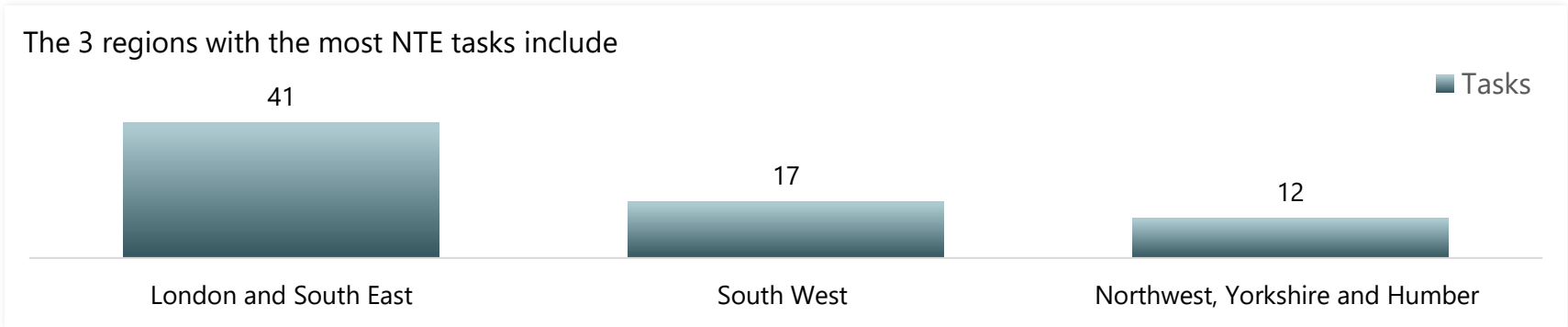
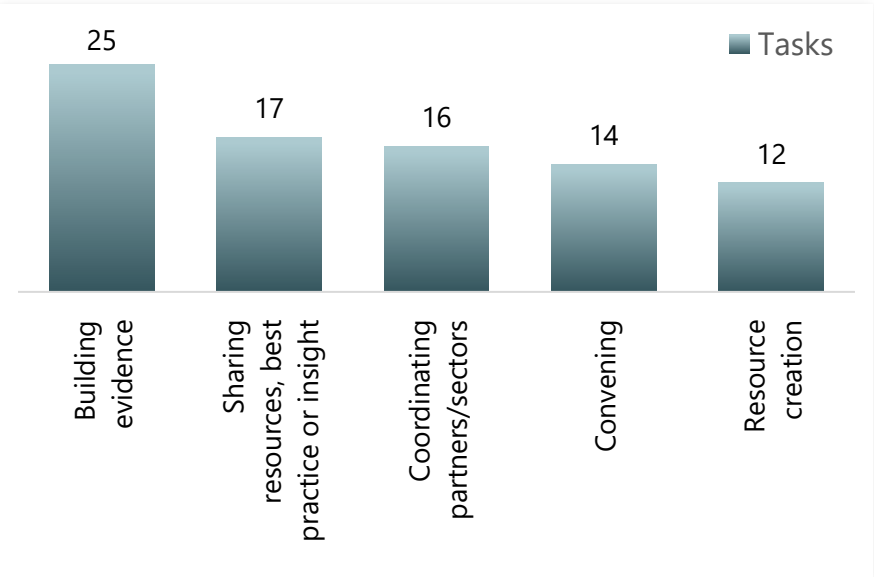
Reach and engagement



The most frequent partner-type is police with **54%** of tasks engaging police directly

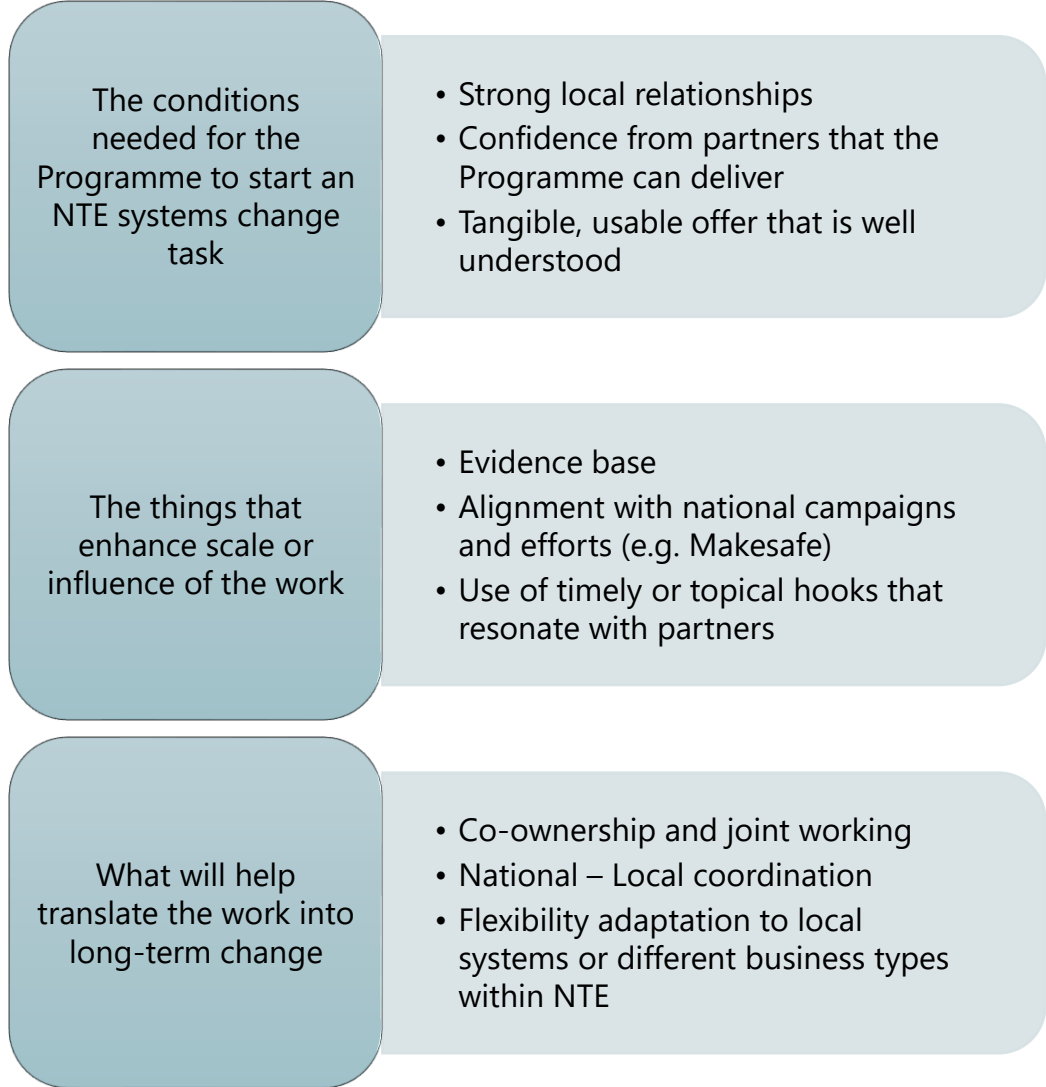


Most commonly used approaches in NTE tasks



1. The number of partners corresponds to individuals not organisations. There is significant double counting within Task Log data. For example, the same partner may be involved in multiple tasks but is reported as separate each time
 2. Makesafe works to prevent CSE in hotels and other forms of accommodation. The work is led by the CSE Taskforce. More information can be found here: <https://www.hydrantprogramme.co.uk/cse-taskforce/operation-makesafe>

4.2 Enabling factors and mechanisms for Programme success in NTE



The Prevention team identified opportunities to work with businesses operating in the NTE with the aim of reducing the risk of exploitation to young people. They identified a range of businesses including taxi drivers, take-a-way outlets, budget hotels and bars where there were opportunities to raise awareness around child exploitation by probing on knowledge, reviewing safeguarding policies, and offering training to staff working in the NTE.

Our spotlights have identified several factors and mechanisms that were reported as contributing to the success of NTE tasks. The approach to working with the NTE differs across regions, responding to local need and engagement. However, some critical success factors are beginning to emerge.

Strong local partnerships. The regional model of delivery plays an important role in partner engagement. The team works with existing contacts in policing, licensing or community safety forums. These relationships take time and consistency to build. Having a known regional lead has helped develop the credibility and trust needed to work with networks such as Pub Watch or Business Crime Reduction Partnerships.

Tangible offer. When the Prevention team were able to approach partners with something tangible (such as contextual safeguarding assessments or practical guidance) this was more likely to establish engagement than a more open-ended approach. Having a named tool or intervention helps in discussions with partners who may not understand the value of the Prevention Programme’s work; a specific tool has the potential to work a clearer purpose making the benefits clearer to potential partners.

Evidence base. A strong evidence base can support engagement especially when working with businesses. Either by demonstrating knowledge or by offering to support the generation of knowledge, Prevention Officers have had success in gaining momentum when evidence-building is part of the offer in NTE work. This contributes to a sense of legitimacy and is a way to open up conversations with additional local and national stakeholders.

Bolstering national ambitions at a local level. The Programme’s NTE work has played a bridging role often translating high-level national ambitions (for example, from Makesafe) into something more usable at a local level. This has enabled local police forces and business partners to engage in practical safeguarding work in a meaningful way.

Spotlight B. Taking a multi-agency approach to understanding NTE challenges in Southport

About the Project

- This project was initially conceived by one of the Prevention Officers who had been working with Merseyside Police from 2023 carrying out visits to hotels and licensed premises (e.g., takeaways, bars, bowling alley) to capture their understanding of child exploitation through discussions and the completion of a survey. Two visits have been made to premises, followed up by reports shared with the police, and further discussions with business to share findings and agree a forward plan of action.
- The Prevention Officer reached out to Sefton Community Safety Partnership and other partners including the Youth Offending Team, and a parent and child/young person's charity established following the Jamie Boulger tragedy to support vulnerable young people in Merseyside.
- The partners were brought together and held several discussions about the challenges and risks to young people; the police provided specific intel into areas of high risk.
- As a seaside town, Southport has a transient population and many bars and nightclubs which taken together, provides potential conditions for exploitation of vulnerable young people.

Enabling change

Sharing intelligence. Extending this work to include multiple partners has given partners the opportunity to share intelligence on risks and vulnerabilities of young people.

Working together has helped to strengthen relationships and develop trust between partners, in particular, the police, the youth offending team, and the charity which offered different perspectives when supporting young people at risk.

Creating deeper understanding. By working in partnership with an expert, partners were given the space and tools to critically review their assumptions about young people as perpetrators of crime. In addition, they were able to develop a deeper understanding of how businesses perceived and reacted to young people who may be at risk of exploitation but exhibit anti-social-behaviour at the same time. A greater understanding of hate crime in the area has been an outcome of the work.

Maintaining momentum. Forming a multi-agency working group has helped to sustain momentum when competing priorities could lead to a withdrawal of resources and a missed opportunity.

Disseminating findings and development of recommendations. Findings have been shared with partners. The Prevention Officer has developed a series of recommendations to improve safeguarding policies in business and a safeguarding flowchart to be piloted in bars.

"There was a lot of enthusiasm in the room to get the deep dive from the Children's Society around this issue" (Sefton Council).

"[Name of Prevention Officer] is pushing for us to be held accountable to do these things, the joint approach pushes us to take action, keep a focus on it." (Merseyside Police).

"It was an eye opener for a lot of the partners – they (partners) use the term of exploitation with an assumption that people know what it is – but there is a lack of understanding among businesses around child exploitation." (Sefton Council).

"We got into discussions about managing arcades linked to Blackpool and they had never heard of how children may be financially exploited by putting money into their accounts and going to a different location to extract this information" (The Children's Society, Prevention Officer).

Spotlight C. Building knowledge. Hotels as potential sites of exploitation in NTE (1)

About the Project

- This pilot project aimed to understand how child exploitation is occurring in budget hotels in South-East England and to identify what could make these spaces safer.
- The pilot included the design and rollout of a survey-based assessment which was delivered by three (3) police forces (Hampshire and Isle of Wight, Thames Valley and Sussex). Surrey started the process but did not complete the process.
- Using the survey designed by the Prevention Programme, the project aimed to conduct contextual safeguarding assessments with three (3) budget hotel chains. With support from the Prevention Programme, it was anticipated that administrative and coordination burden for police partners would be minimised.
- The Prevention Officer ran regular Task and Finish groups between the partnering police forces, and this facilitated the sharing of ideas to improve the completion rate.
- A total of 95 safeguarding survey-based assessments were completed.

Enabling change

Understanding business realities. The Programme recognised and adapted to the operational contexts of business such as concerns around brand reputation, demand on staff capacity to participate, the difference between in-house and outsourced staff and the implications for safeguarding training. This practical understanding helped to avoid friction and build goodwill with the hotels.

Mutual learning. Stakeholders reflect that the project worked well because it facilitated police learning about business models and vice versa. The Prevention Officer acted as a 'bridge' between the sectors.

Strong resources and training. The Programme is well respected for its resources and training. Stakeholders regard the Programme as able to adapt to different businesses within the NTE.

Elevating the experiences of young people. The Programme is well respected for elevating the voice and experience of young people and reminding stakeholders about the reasons why this preventative work is important.

A neutral and credible partner. As a charity partner, The Children's Society are seen as somewhat neutral and supportive whereas the police are sometimes seen as a challenging partner for NTE businesses.

"The timing was perfect. We already wanted to revisit our Makesafe work, so the pilot gave us the structure and motivation to do it properly. It felt like part of a bigger movement, not just us on our own" (Sussex Police).

"The Children's Society, with their deep engagement with young people, are able to keep the core purpose of protecting children and young people front and centre. They bring a unique perspective that ensures we don't lose sight of why this work is so important in the first place" (National CSE Development Coordinator, NPCC Hydrant Programme & the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce).

Spotlight C. Building knowledge. Hotels as potential sites of exploitation in NTE (2)

Outcomes achieved so far

- **Building a strong evidence base.** The outcome most valued by external stakeholders is the development of a strong, detailed evidence base around safeguarding risks in the hotel sector. The granularity of data collected (for both hotels and police forces) enables the identification of safeguarding red flags, highlighting training needs and supporting operational decision-making, especially in relation to Makesafe. Some key learning points include.
 - Hotels' safeguarding policies are sometimes poorly understood by staff
 - Digital booking systems and 'no service' (digital) check-ins can create vulnerabilities in safeguarding practice
- **Improved trust between police and hotels.** The project has contributed to building a collaborative and solution-focused relationship between police forces and hotels. The assessments were framed as non-judgmental and constructive. Police stakeholders reflect that businesses in the NTE (e.g. hotels, taxis, takeaways) often have adversarial relationships with the police. The Prevention Programme succeeded in reframing police presence as constructive and taking steps to open up honest conversations.
- **Identifying gaps in safeguarding awareness.** The project has contributed to identifying specific challenges in awareness such as outsourced staff (e.g. housekeeping teams) who are often in a position to notice signs of exploitation but at present lack the necessary training to act.

"I was generally surprised [to learn through this project] as to how easy the whole hotel booking process can be and how undetected things can go, including people being let in through back entrances who aren't even guests" (Hampshire and IoW Constabulary).

"If we get this right, we're not just doing visits - we're embedding a safeguarding culture across the NTE" (Sussex Police).

"I think the most obvious example [of learning] is where you've got hotels where reception is not on [the] ground floor. So that poses an additional risk, because someone can go to reception, check in and get a key card, and then let [anyone] in the lifts on the ground floor, because no one's necessarily going to see that"(National CSE Development Coordinator, NPCC Hydrant Programme & the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce).

"When we can relaunch Operation Makesafe, we'll be able to really focus and target the hotels we identified through this project that need more education and training on spotting signs of exploitation and how to report it properly." (Hampshire and IoW Constabulary).

"Some hotels outsource their room cleaning to external companies and the hotel managers couldn't even answer what training those cleaning staff receive around safeguarding and exploitation. So the cleaners going into the rooms may be missing signs of exploitation due to lack of training." (Hampshire and IoW Constabulary).

Spotlight C. Building knowledge. Hotels as potential sites of exploitation in NTE (3)

How Sussex Police have benefited from engaging with Prevention

The Prevention Programme's work with hotels coincided with the national rebranding of Makesafe, which added momentum and meant that the involvement in the pilot was not seen as extra work but added value to local plans.

Sussex Police welcomed being involved at "every step of the pilot" including language choices and designing the assessment tool.

They felt that the contextual safeguarding assessment tool provided a structured but flexible way to engage hotels and open-up conversations.

Participating in a national pilot created opportunities for shared learning across forces, allowing Sussex Police to both contribute to and benefit from insights emerging elsewhere. This sense of collective momentum helped validate their approach and sparked ideas for future adaptations.

Sussex Police are keen to ensure hotels continue to feel supported. They are also keen to adapt the methodology for other NTE contexts such as cinemas and leisure centres.

Anticipated future impacts and aspirations

- The process has already influenced future rollouts and adaptations, showing early signs of being replicable and scalable in other regions. Participants expressed a high degree of confidence that the pilot is adaptable to other sectors that have frequent, informal contact with the public and late-night or unsupervised environments. Sectors that were mentioned as being of interest to an adapted project include taxis and private hire, fast food chains, vape shops, bars, Airbnbs.
- By identifying training gaps, especially among outsourced frontline staff such as housekeeping teams, the project has laid the groundwork for more comprehensive and targeted training interventions.
- Improved trust between police and hotel staff is also likely to support sustained intelligence-sharing and earlier intervention, reducing the risk of exploitation going unnoticed.

Consideration points for adapting the pilot

The approach piloted with hotels has strong potential to be adapted for other businesses. Principles to continue in future iterations include:

- Focusing on sector-specific safeguarding risks.
- Approaching businesses in a supportive, non-judgmental way.
- Building trust before asking for collaboration.
- Using business-relevant examples.

There are some practice considerations:

- Need to understand the business operating model (e.g. shift work).
- Need to adjust for licensing and regulation differences (e.g., taxis vs Airbnb).
- Be mindful of scale (e.g., fast-food chains = many small outlets).
- Clarity about the workload and skills required would make it easier for police teams to support the delivery.
- Some of the work required a high level of administrative support (e.g., booking appointments with hotel managers). To handle the volume and complexity of this work, there might be a need for dedicated administrative support.

4.3 Barriers and Lessons Learned in NTE work

“When we say we want to talk about child exploitation, the automatic response of somebody like Pub Watch is, ‘Well we don’t serve under eighteens, so why are you here?’” (Prevention team member).

“The person I’ve been champion building with is brilliant. But the person a step higher isn’t won over yet, and we’re still advocating with them” (Prevention team member).

Challenges in the operating environment

- Commercial partners are hard to engage meaningfully and are less incentivised to engage compared to statutory partners. Businesses need motivation to act. The Prevention team has to begin by persuading potential business audiences that they could benefit from engagement with the Programme.
- High staff turnover in the NTE makes it difficult to build relationships over time. Once knowledge has been gained it can be lost again quickly so there is a need to continue to raise awareness.
- Variation in local business networks means that conditions for success are not equally available to everyone. In areas with strong Pub Watch or business forums, engagement is easier to initiate than those without a strong forum or network.

Capacity and commitment among delivery partners

- Partners who have the potential to support initiatives with businesses in the NTE (e.g. police) are sometimes under-resourced and where there is a lack of agreements on the specifics, this can lead to hesitancy to support such initiatives, particularly in longer-term work.
- In some areas, the success of NTE work has been closely tied to individual Prevention Officers. Where there have been personnel changes, or where new staff are yet to build a local presence, some areas of work struggled to gain traction.

Creating synergies with other programmes and initiatives

- The Prevention Team has identified potential opportunities to collaborate with and complement other national initiatives (such as Makesafe). There is an opportunity for the Prevention team leaders to support this strategy going forward.
- Interviews with stakeholders (albeit a small sample) suggest that the number of campaigns and programmes operating on child exploitation may lead to some confusion amongst target businesses.

Limitations in converting engagement into change

- The regional approach also creates dependencies. Evidence builds credibility but it does not guarantee action. Without clear follow-up (e.g. partner-led action, national guidance, etc.) evidence can remain under-utilised. The Prevention team themselves have limited control over how or when that happens.

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**Consideration points for
future work**

5.1 Conclusion

This focused evaluation evidences that the Prevention Programme has developed into a credible, well-performing initiative. It delivers meaningful work under challenging conditions including variability in partners’ readiness to engage, different delivery contexts and available resources.

- From our interviews with partners who worked with the Prevention team, evidence shows that the team consistently delivered well and demonstrated an ability to adapt to local contexts and challenges.
- Delivery has matured over time, with many tasks blending multiple approaches and building towards more sustained change.
- The Programme’s work, evidenced through the spotlights on the NTE (section 4.2), data from #LookCloser (section 3.5), and from the training survey (section 3.6) show encouraging signs of impact.
- Data from the task logs and partner survey submissions demonstrate that systems change focused predominantly on statutory safeguarding systems (section 3.2), with selective and opportunistic extensions into other sectors and national spaces.

The Programme has evolved over time from a collection of regionally delivered projects into a more coherent and adaptive model that blends direct engagement with strategic influence. For example, public-facing work like the #LookCloser campaign continues to raise national awareness at scale, while focused pilots, such as those in the NTE demonstrate how the Programme is shaping multi-agency practice in high-risk contexts. The design and testing of tools to support reflective safeguarding practice shows the Programme’s increasing role in building usable evidence for frontline professionals.

Interviews with the Prevention team evidenced the flexibility and responsiveness of approaches across the regions that were shaped by the expertise held within the team. However, some of the initiatives were vulnerable when continuity was lost due to staff turnover.

Since the start of delivery (2019), the Programme has operated within an annual commissioning cycle (renewed on an annual/bi-annual basis) which makes long-term planning and sustained relationship-building difficult. The most recent 2023-25 Programme was commissioned for two years (rather than one) providing relative continuity and stability. This has enabled the team to strengthen partnerships, invest in learning and evidence building, and trial new approaches with greater confidence.

With the right conditions, in particular, greater continuity and longer-term investment, the Programme and its team are well placed to deepen their impact and extend their influence across systems.

5.2 Considerations for the next phase

This was a focused learning review, not a full evaluation. As such, our recommendations are not intended to be exhaustive or definitive. However, based on the evidence reviewed and insights gathered, we offer the following considerations to support the Prevention team and commissioners as they plan the Programme's next phase.

1. If the Programme aims to influence at scale, it cannot solely rely on regionally dispersed Officers. Introducing thematic, skills-based and/or sector-specific leads could help drive strategy with national partners and contribute to sector-wide coherence. This should not be a replacement for regionally-based Prevention Officers who are essential for building relationships but should add value and momentum on priority areas where needed. Examples of where specific skills or expertise might be helpful include: research, business sectors (e.g. hotels, taxis, hospitality) and/or facilitation.
2. The ability of the Programme to elevate the voices and experiences of young people is seen as a distinctive strength by stakeholders (albeit a small sample in this review). We encourage the Programme to build on this by positioning youth voice as a core feature of its offer. This could be a powerful entry point for engaging partners who may be reluctant to act but have the most to learn.
3. There remains a need for clear guidance and shared expectations around how national initiatives should align, particularly where programme remits overlap. This would help the Prevention Programme to coordinate more effectively with other national Programmes, including those commissioned by the Home Office, and avoid duplication or tension.
4. As the Programme continues to evolve, there would be value in mapping its specific strengths and contributions in relation to evidence-building to clarify where it adds most value and how this can support broader efforts to embed learning and improve safeguarding practice across the system.
5. We suggest a shift in MEL focus with less emphasis on counting tasks, reach and indirect reach. This would require the commissioner to be willing to prioritise learning about Programme contribution to outcomes over performance metrics. This does not need to be resource-heavy, but it does require a clear message that learning matters more than performance statistics. A Pathway of Change can be found in the Appendix and provides a useful start. In addition, a proposed Impact and Learning Framework has been submitted in parallel to this report.
6. To maximise impact, we recommend that the Home Office consider longer-term funding, of at least three years. This would improve staff recruitment and retention and would enable the management team to plan for longer-term sustainable operations.



Thank you

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