

Prevention Programme 2025-26 Evaluation Report

A report for The Children's Society

16th June 2026

FINAL REPORT



By Emma Roberts and Louise Starks

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1 Executive Summary

This report evaluates the 2025–26 Prevention Programme delivered by The Children’s Society and commissioned by the Home Office. The Programme works across England and Wales to prevent child exploitation by improving professional practice and influencing systems. The behaviours it seeks to influence include earlier identification of exploitation, more child-centred language, stronger challenge to victim-blaming, routine use of disruption, better multi-agency information sharing and more confident safeguarding action by businesses and professionals.

The evaluation finds strong evidence of contribution to improved professional knowledge, confidence, appropriate use of language and multi-agency working.

Evidence of sustained behaviour change among professionals and wider system change is emerging and is shaped by external conditions (including commissioning timelines, capacity and workforce stability).

The evaluation included 30 interviews (22 with external partners and 8 with The Children’s Society team) and survey data of nearly 4,000 responses.

The work was guided by the following Evaluation Questions (EQs) and Learning Questions (LQs).

- EQ1. What can we learn about the Programme’s overall contribution to the outcomes in the Pathway of Change?
- EQ2. What evidence shows how Youth Voice¹ work is shaping practice, engagement or policy? What makes Prevention’s Youth Voice approach distinctive?
- LQ3. What is the staff team learning about what makes Prevention work effectively?

The Programme delivers complex, relationship-based and systems-oriented work in conditions shaped by annual commissioning and budget pressure, with associated workforce instability in 2025–26. These conditions constrain continuity and the ability to evidence system behaviours within a 12-month cycle, making it important to align expectations, resourcing and time horizons with the Programme’s dual aims (reach and depth).

¹ A programme of youth consultation to amplify the voices of young people and inform both the work of the Programme and the wider sector

Key findings

- **The Programme had a broad reach:** In 2025–26, the Programme delivered 370 tasks across England and Wales, combining learning sessions, workshops, guidance, campaigns and partnership activity with audiences including law enforcement, education, businesses, local authorities and the third sector. It is estimated to have directly reached c.55,000 people from a range of professions, including (but not limited to) law enforcement professionals, healthcare, education, and businesses in the night-time economy, including taxi drivers and private hire.
- **Professional knowledge and confidence improved:** Strong evidence of improved knowledge as a result of the Programme activities, especially from learning sessions which have a large reach.
- **Disruption practice is gaining traction and becoming more routine:** For some external partners, disruption is becoming more routine as a result of working with the Programme (including use of toolkits and more consistent discussion in meetings), with partners asking for further support.
- **Multi-agency working is strengthened:** Partners describe better coordination, information sharing and value from cross-sector learning and constructive challenge. This is often as a result of the Programme working with a set of partners over a longer period of time.
- **Use of appropriate Language is improving:** Participants report more child-centred language, increased challenge of victim-blaming and adoption of language guidance/resources.
- **Implementation is constrained by external barriers:** Intended changes do not always translate into sustained practice due to capacity, stability and leadership buy-in at the external partner organisation.
- **Business awareness is improving, but evidence of behaviour change is patchy:** Businesses – especially those in the night-time economy - report increased preparedness, with examples of follow-up activity (e.g., additional training).
- **Understanding of inequities is strengthening, with demand for practical tools:** Partners want more applied training/resources (including for groups who experience unequal access to support) to move from awareness to action.
- **Youth Voice work** delivered by the Programme is a distinctive and valued contribution, supporting more child-centred reflection and practice. Its distinctiveness lies in high-quality facilitation and safeguarding, reaching young people “where they are”, and an intention to create feedback loops to young people (“you said / we did”).

Implications for practice (summary):

The consideration points below are informed by the evaluation evidence and are offered for consideration by The Children's Society and the Home Office.

- Agree and resource an operating model that sustains both broad reach and deeper partnership work, while recognising that short annual commissioning cycles make it difficult to deliver and evidence both effectively.
- If systems change is a priority, it is important to ensure the Prevention Officer role continues to be aligned with the level of skill and experience required, with clearly defined expectations and scope.
- Invest further in Youth Voice as a mechanism for impact. Protect the ethical delivery model and strengthen the pipeline of accessible outputs used across training, guidance and influencing, with clearer calls to action.
- Clarify and prioritise #LookCloser target audiences. Focus on "gateway" audiences in high-relevance settings and measure outcomes using credible indicators rather than headline impression metrics.
- The Programme should prioritise a small number of high-value, practice-ready products each year (notably disruption and inclusion/inequities resources), with clear ownership, dissemination and adoption measures.
- It would be helpful for the Prevention team to better understand the Home Office portfolio of exploitation prevention Programmes. It would be useful to have access to a shared portfolio-level Pathway of Change for all exploitation prevention-related Programmes commissioned by the Home Office.

2 The Prevention Programme

2.1 About the Prevention Programme 2025-26

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 2026, the Programme was coming to the end of its seventh year of operation. The Programme has historically been commissioned on an annual or biennial cycle. This evaluation report focuses on the annual Programme delivered between April 2025 and March 2026.

The 2025-26 Programme focussed on six priorities, co-developed by The Prevention Team at The Children's Society and the Home Office. These were:

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 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.
4. To embed disruption within safeguarding practice.
5. To address victim-blaming language and practice.
6. Improving awareness of and responses to Child Financial Exploitation at a national level.

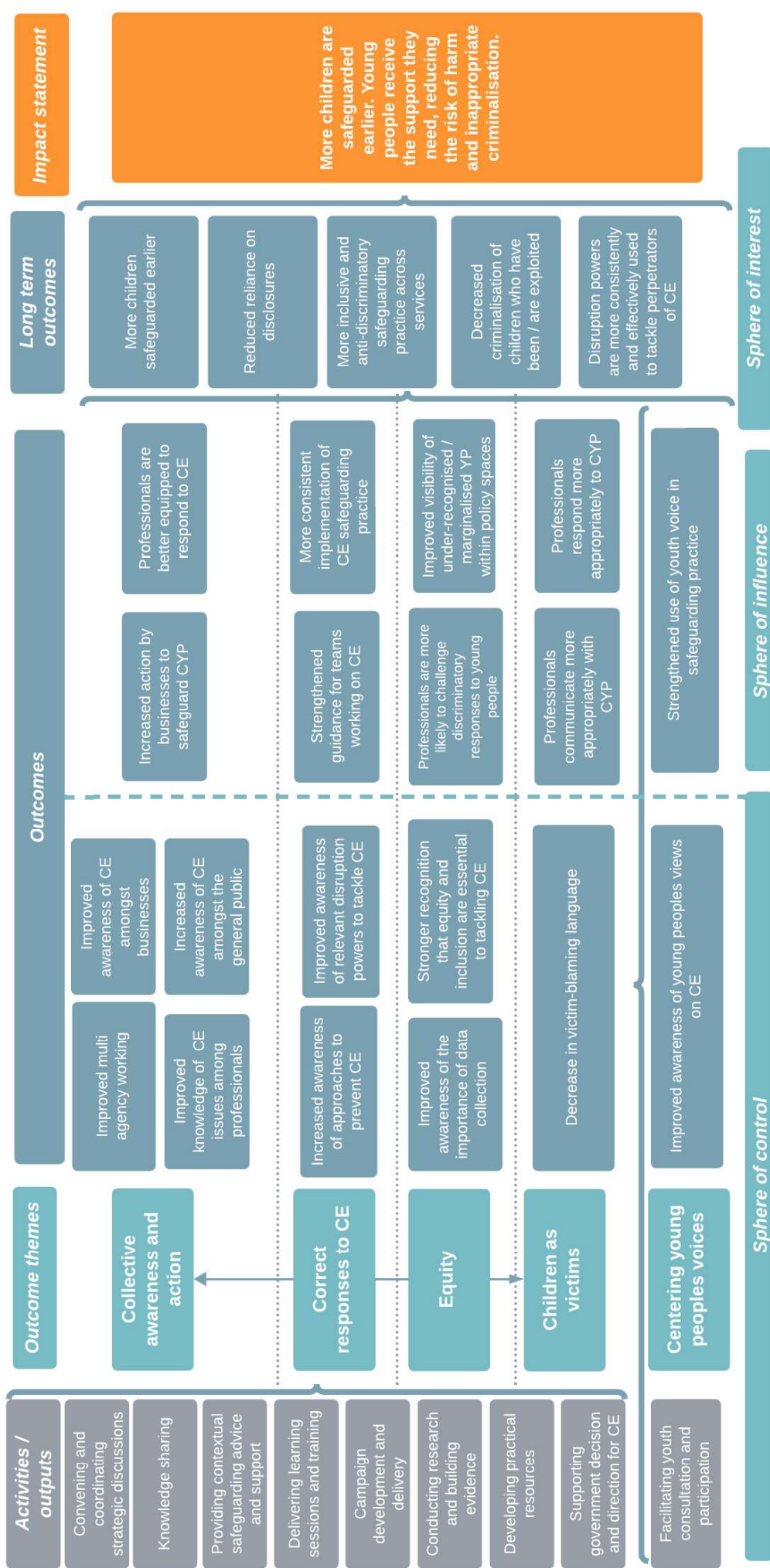
The Prevention Programme is monitored internally by recording the number and type of 'tasks' delivered (a task is defined as a specific piece of work that aligns with a Programme priority) alongside participant numbers and any feedback received. A 'project' refers to a collection of tasks on a similar theme or with a similar aim.

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. It is important to note that lighter-touch activity, including one-off sessions, can also contribute to wider systems change by influencing professional language, awareness and shared practice.

As part of the 2023-25 Prevention Programme evaluation, SocialQual facilitated a Pathway of Change (also known as a Theory of Change) process with the Prevention team. The Pathway aims to articulate intended changes (outcomes) beyond a single commissioned Programme-year. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

The Youth Voice strand (also referred to as 'centring young people's voices' and 'youth consultation') is of specific interest in this evaluation. This is because it represents a fairly new approach for the Programme, first introduced in 2023. While it represents a distinct priority (3 above) and strand in the Pathway of Change, it is also expected to crosscut and influence work related to other priorities. More information about the objectives of the Youth Voice work can be found in Section 5 of this report.

Figure 1: Prevention Programme Pathway of Change



2.2 The Prevention Programme 2025-2026 in numbers

2.2.1 The Programme's numerical task data

The data presented in this section was collected by the Programme team.

The Programme started 412 tasks, of which 370 were completed by the end of March 2026.

The data collected about tasks does not reflect the scale or depth of activity. The task log is useful for understanding the scale and spread of Programme activity, but it does not capture the depth or complexity of work. A single task may range from a one-off intervention to sustained partnership activity over time. This means task counts should not be interpreted as a proxy for value, intensity or contribution to outcomes. Task log data does not consistently capture how external audiences or partners experienced the activity.

2.2.2 Who the Programme has reached

Total direct reach (i.e. number of people who are known to engage first-hand with activity or content) is estimated to be c.55,000 people².

Based on the available data, the largest sector audience within this is estimated to be taxis and private hire (representing roughly 25%³ of direct reach). Education, business, local authorities and law enforcement are also strongly represented, each accounting for approximately 4,000 people reached.

Top sector audiences by number of tasks are:

- Law enforcement / police – 197
- Health / Healthcare – 105
- Education – 100
- Third / voluntary sector -99
- Local authority – 94

Higher task volumes in sectors such as law enforcement, health, education and local authority may reflect more in-depth or relationship-based work — for example, training, follow-up activity, consultation or partnership development. By contrast, sectors representing a higher share of overall audience/reach (such as taxi and private hire, businesses) may have been engaged through more scalable activity, such as newsletters, campaign dissemination or resources that can reach larger groups in a single intervention.

² There is likely to have been double counting within this number. For example, the same people may have been reached by multiple tasks but are counted again at each entry

³ The estimate that taxis and private hire represent c.25% of total direct reach is based on an apportionment of recorded direct reach across all audience sectors listed for each task. Where a task named multiple audience sectors, direct reach was divided equally between them.

2.2.3 How the Programme works

The Programme takes a mix of approaches, the majority of which are learning sessions and workshops (157 tasks), building evidence (60 tasks) and sharing resources, best practice or insight (44 tasks).

Tasks have been recorded based on their primary priority (as outlined in section 2.1). A large number of tasks (129 tasks, representing 35% of all completed tasks) are recorded as contributing to the #LookCloser campaign. This is followed by night time economy (NTE) (96, 26%) and Disruption (78, 21%).

2.2.4 Where the Programme has been active

The Programme has been active in all English regions and Wales. Many of the completed tasks have been national (106, representing 29% of all tasks).

Figure 2: Number of tasks by region

Region grouping	Completed tasks
National	106
Cumbria, North Yorkshire and the North East	70
Northwest, Yorkshire and Humber	57
London and South East	38
East of England	35
West Midlands	29
South West	23
East Midlands	18
Wales	15

3 Evaluation method

3.1 Approach and data sources

This evaluation uses a theory-informed approach to understand what changes the Programme has contributed to and how those changes happened. The approach focuses on surfacing change and making sense of how Prevention's ways of working shape outcomes in the Pathway of Change.

The work is guided by the following Evaluation Questions (EQs) and Learning Questions (LQs).

- EQ1. What can we learn about the Programme's overall contribution to the outcomes in the Pathway of Change?
- EQ2. What evidence shows how Youth Voice work is shaping practice, engagement or policy? What makes Prevention's Youth Voice approach distinctive?
- LQ3. What is the staff team learning about what makes Prevention work effectively?

The evaluation methodology is informed by an Impact and Learning Framework⁴ developed by SocialQual in June 2025 as part of the 2023-5 evaluation process.

The evaluation draws on multiple data sources, including:

- 30 interviews (22 external partners and 8 from TCS)
- Data from various surveys administered by the Prevention team (c.4k responses)

The breakdown of data sources is outlined in Figure 2.

⁴ The Impact and Learning Framework includes a set of indicators for the outcomes in the Pathway of Change. It also suggests a number of data collection tools for the Prevention team and associated evaluators to use.

Figure 3: Data collection sources and methods

Method	Sample or source
Secondary data analysis aligned with the indicators in the Prevention Programme's Impact and Learning Framework ⁵	Task log (as described in section 2.2.1) Feedback survey (post-training) N=3675⁶ Annual partner survey (APS) (shared with all known external Programme participants early 2026). The APS was shared with all known partners / audiences who have engaged with the Programme during the 2025/26 period and was administered in January 2026 N = 103 Survey of business participants (this was a separate survey administered by the Prevention team) N = 112
Most Significant Change (MSC) deep dives	2 x projects (cluster of related tasks) selected 4 x external interviews for each project (total of 8 interviews) 2 x interviews with relevant Prevention Officers
Partner interviews	6 randomly selected across regions and themes 3 with external partners who are known to have received information about the Youth Voice work
Youth Voice Host Organisation Interviews	5
Interviews with Youth Voice workers at TCS including Prevention and beyond	3
Interview with Prevention Programme Managers, Officers and TCS Director	5

Findings in this report draw on multiple sources of evidence, primarily survey data and qualitative interviews, which serve different purposes in the analysis. Survey data is used mainly to indicate the scale or prevalence of reported shifts, while interviews are used to explore how change happened and how it was experienced. The analysis also considered

⁵ A separate document was created at the beginning of the evaluation period (January 2026) and includes details about data analysis methods.

⁶ Feedback survey data was collected in 6 various sub-surveys. Where possible, we have aggregated questions across the set to give an overall response rate of N=3675. Some sub-surveys (and related questions) have lower responses rates. These response rates are noted throughout the report as applicable.

whether themes were raised spontaneously or in response to prompts during qualitative interviews. This informed the evaluator's interpretation of which issues appeared most prominent or meaningful to participants. Not every finding is supported by the same mix of evidence, so the report uses wording that reflects the available evidence rather than labelling every point by source. See Appendix B for the evidence descriptor guide; these judgements are intended to support proportionate interpretation of the evidence, not to imply a precise scoring system.

In the Youth Voice strand, some evidence about young people's experience comes from host organisations and practitioners rather than directly from young people themselves. As part of the evaluation process, we considered the possibility of consulting with young people directly for this evaluation, but felt that it was disproportionate to run an evaluation-focused consultation about a one-off interaction with the Prevention Programme. Instead, we decided that host organisations' staff can offer useful insight about how young people engaged in the sessions. The report does not treat partner or host accounts as a substitute for young people's own perspectives. Where host organisations comment on young people's experience, this should be read as proxy evidence and interpreted alongside the direct Youth Voice insight generated through the consultations themselves.

A small amount of content has been removed from this final version of the report because it relates to internal operational matters that are commercially sensitive. This includes findings about internal capacity and resourcing considerations. These findings were made visible to senior colleagues at TCS but have been removed for wider circulation because this information is sensitive in the context of future commissioning or tender activity.

3.2 Building on previous evaluations of the Prevention Programme

The Prevention Programme has been evaluated regularly as a core part of the contract with the Home Office. Previous evaluations have generated valuable insight into what was delivered and how the activity was received. A small number of methodological limitations were identified in earlier evaluation work, including a reliance on output (task) data and a skewed sample of respondents for qualitative work (whereby respondents were identified directly by the Prevention team) and therefore risks reinforcing positive narratives of the Programme (positivity bias). This evaluation was designed to address those gaps. In response, this approach:

- Used more intentional and transparent sampling, including attempts to reach a more random spread of external partners, rather than relying solely on known/engaged stakeholders for qualitative interviews.
- Built learning sessions into the process so that the Prevention team can learn from one another rather than assuming that a written evaluation report is the best or preferred medium for reflection.

- The use of a Most Significant Change (MSC) inspired approach was used for two project case studies (spotlights). The case studies were jointly identified by the evaluators and the Prevention team to highlight projects that reflect work unique to the 2025-26 Programme. The MSC approach was a way to surface which changes mattered most to the external partners (and minimising Programme or evaluator bias in the questions asked) and to create space for unexpected changes to be discussed openly.

3.3 Limitations and reflections on the method

- In the Impact and Learning Framework (2025) developed for Prevention, optimal sample sizes were suggested for future evaluations. Given The Children's Society's requested focus (with Youth Voice and team learning being key priorities) and the resources available for this evaluation, we have not achieved the optimal sample sizes (e.g. we have completed 6 rather than 12 random partner interviews, and we have completed 2 MSC case studies rather than 4).
- Findings are largely based on self-reported and perceived change by the participants. While these perspectives offer understanding, they do not always provide independently verified evidence of outcomes.
- Not all Prevention projects or tasks were covered by the qualitative work. The evaluation focused on a subset of activities to enable deeper exploration. As a result, the findings should be understood as illustrative rather than exhaustive.
- Given that the 2025-26 Programme was less than 12 months into delivery at the time of conducting the evaluation, much of the change is described as emerging rather than fully realised. Many of the changes describe shifts in confidence, thinking or relationships that are still developing and may not have translated into sustained practice changes. There is a risk that the Prevention Programme work delivered within short commissioning cycles is judged prematurely, before change has had time to mature. The findings in this report should therefore be read as a snapshot of learning and progress, not a definitive assessment of long-term impact.
- The surveys administered by the Prevention team (notably the feedback survey and the business survey) were adjusted several times throughout the year. The adjustments were minor in most cases, but it has meant that sample sizes for some indicators are different and the phrasing of some questions differs from survey to survey. Where possible, the feedback surveys have been combined into one dataset (N= 3675), but for some questions (see figure 3, for example), there is a smaller response rate. Sample sizes have been noted throughout the report.
- It is difficult to isolate Prevention's contribution from other influences operating within the same systems. This evaluation does not claim direct attribution. Instead, it offers a contribution-based account of how Prevention activity has shaped thinking, behaviour and decision-making alongside other factors.

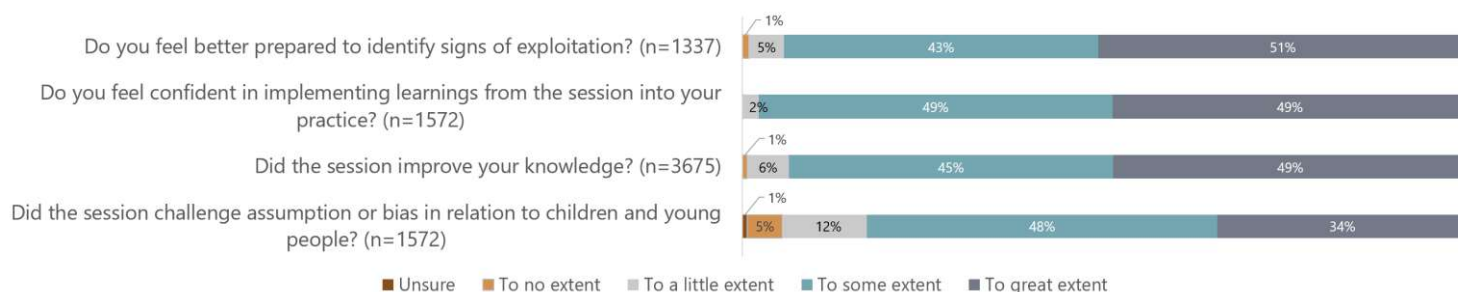
4 Findings about the Programme's contribution

This section (4) responds mainly to EQ1: What are we learning about the Programme's contribution to the outcomes in the Pathway of Change?

4.1 Strong improvement in professional knowledge of child exploitation issues

Evidence suggests the Programme is contributing to strong improvements in professionals' knowledge of child exploitation issues, with many also reporting increased confidence.

Figure 4: Strong improvement in knowledge and confidence (Feedback surveys n=1337-3675 depending on the question)



This pattern is echoed in the Annual Partner Survey (APS) (N=103), where most partners agree or strongly agree that their knowledge has improved and that they feel more confident in identifying exploitation.

- 93% agree/strongly agree they have improved knowledge of child exploitation issues (56% strongly agree; 37% agree).
- 83% agree/strongly agree they are more confident identifying exploitation (50% strongly agree; 38% agree).

Participants value clearer guidance on what to look for in everyday settings. This points to increased capability alongside a recognition of the complexity of child exploitation, which may be an important precursor to more reflective safeguarding practice.

Quote box 1: How partners describe improved knowledge

"[The Programme taught us about] things to look out for when you're with kids, whether it's our classroom, school classroom, you know, key facts that we perhaps were not aware of. So it was super beneficial for us to understand. And yes, it was deep and profound, and some of them felt a tiny bit overwhelmed,

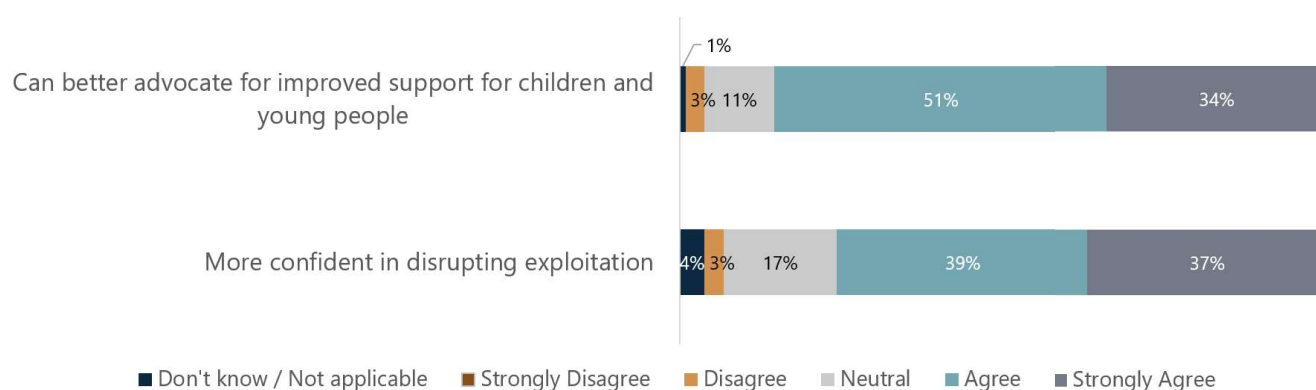
but that was expected because of the subject matter at hand" (partner interview).

4.2 Disruption is becoming more routine in some organisations

There is emerging evidence that disruption is becoming more routine in some organisations, with examples of it being integrated into meetings, assessments and day-to-day safeguarding practice. In the context of the Programme, disruption refers to taking action to stop a perpetrator from harming victims. The Programme has developed a reflective disruption assessment tool for partners to assess their knowledge, confidence and current practice, and has also put together best practice guidance on how to disrupt exploitation.

Disruption is one of the areas where the Programme's activities appear most likely to translate into concrete changes in day-to-day practice. Disruption has repeatedly emerged as an intended 'next step' for respondents in the feedback survey. Some respondents described plans to normalise disruption as part of everyday safeguarding practice, explicitly integrating disruption into meetings, assessments and exploring wider tactical options (including civil orders such as Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders (STROs) and Sexual Risk Orders (SROs).

Figure 5: Greater confidence and ability to advocate for children and young people (APS survey N=103)



Interviewed partners described moving from treating disruption as an add-on, to embedding it as a core part of strategic and operational planning, case discussions and reflective conversations. This suggests the Programme is prompting practitioners to move beyond awareness of exploitation towards taking actions that target perpetrators, spaces and enabling conditions.

Quote box 2: How partners describe embedding disruption practices

"We have made purposeful changes to the service by embedding advice and guidance around disrupting exploitation into our strategy meetings and everyday practice conversations. This has ensured that disruption activity is no longer seen as an add-on, but as a core part of how we think, plan, and respond to risk. By routinely discussing disruption tactics in case discussions and reflective conversations, practitioners are better supported to consider proactive, creative, and proportionate actions that reduce harm and strengthen protective networks around young people" (APS).

"The use of a case study in the serious organised crime partnership development day supported by The Children Society worked well and engaged partners in having conversations about collective disruption planning" (APS).

There remains a strong appetite for this work and some APS respondents requested further resources and sessions around disruption.

Quote box 3: Partners request further support around disruption

"[We would like Prevention to] provide further resources/sessions around disruption and perpetrator behaviour/grooming cycle in more depth" (respondent to the feedback survey).

Spotlight 1: A Safeguarding Children's Partnership Journey to Disrupting Exploitation

About the project and the needs it was addressing

In one local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SCP) the Prevention Programme focused on strengthening how child exploitation is understood, discussed and disrupted across the local safeguarding system.

In 2024, the Programme worked closely with a SCP to facilitate a multi-agency disruption self-assessment, which highlighted gaps in knowledge, confidence and the use of appropriate language when responding to child exploitation. The assessment identified that disruption activity was often confined to specialist perpetrator forums and viewed as the sole responsibility of the police, rather than being embedded across wider safeguarding processes and everyday practice.

"What we were recognising was that there's still a culture ... that disruption activity was seen as an enforcement responsibility. So typically it was, 'oh the police do that' or 'licensing do that', or perhaps children's social care do it..."
(Safeguarding Children's Partnership Manager).

Alongside this, a short survey was distributed by the Prevention Programme to professionals including police, children's services, third sector, health, operational managers and strategic leads to better understand levels of confidence, perceived roles in disruption activity and ongoing training needs. The results reinforced the need for disruption to be treated as a shared, multi-agency responsibility rather than a discrete policing function.

Ways in which the Prevention Programme is adding value

The Prevention Programme maintained relationships over the last year and a half and has worked with the SCP to establish a multi-agency working group to address the issues identified. This included the delivery of an online workshop on disrupting child exploitation for professionals from social care, police, education, health and the voluntary sector. To ensure reach and sustainability, the session was recorded and hosted on the partnership's internal training platform. A Children's Services Manager described this intervention as highly valuable for reigniting a multi-agency focus on disruption and for building relationships across services that often operate in silos.

"It was good from a networking point of view, it was good to get everybody together... looking at things from different people's perspectives and having that active challenge, because so much stuff's done in silo" (Service Manager, Integrated Front Door, Children's Services).

The partnership manager also highlighted the value of independent external challenge:

"There were certainly potential blind spots that if we hadn't included The Children's Society around that work, that we would have come at it still robustly from a local perspective, but we wouldn't necessarily have seen everything" (Safeguarding Children's Partnership Manager).

Recently, the Prevention team supported the partnership through a case file audit to help agencies review where and how disruption discussions were taking place, including scrutiny of victim-blaming language in case records and meetings. The Prevention Programme provided a detailed audit pack and multiple agencies independently reviewed the same selected high-risk cases from their own records. The Service Manager reported

that the audit was thorough, and covered issues such as risk, disruption activity, victim-blaming language, actions taken against perpetrators, and whether disruption measures were reviewed and escalated appropriately.

Contribution to outcomes and impact

The Children's Service Manager reported that early learning from the audit suggests that agencies in the area are likely undertaking more disruption work than is being explicitly recorded and that the impact of disruption activity on children is not always clearly documented in case files. This is preventing agencies from sharing information and intelligence on young people as well as capturing the impact of their activities regarding disruption.

"For example, we've got a gang injunction in our area against three perpetrators of exploitation, which is a really, really positive factor. What we've then not done is put that in children's files to say this gang injunction will impact on you because we know you're being exploited by X, Y & Z"
(Service Manager, Integrated Front Door, Children's Services).

As a result of the training and audit there is an improved awareness of the need to share intelligence across agencies and to act on information. Partners noted the valuable support received from the Prevention Programme describing them as *"responsive, credible and practically helpful"*, and confirmed that some immediate "quick wins" have already been implemented including cross referencing disruption activities between the police and children's services case recordings, rather than waiting for final audit outcomes.

Wider systems change

The audit highlighted issues with recording rather than practice: much effective disruption work to address child exploitation was happening but was not consistently or explicitly documented on individual children's case files. Group-based interventions, such as gang injunctions or police operations, often had indirect benefits for children but were difficult to record against specific cases, meaning the impact could be overlooked by auditors or professionals unfamiliar with the context. The team carrying out the audit was meeting to take forward actions on their findings.

Taken together, these elements are contributing to a noticeable shift in professional language and culture, with partners increasingly recognising children as victims of exploitation and challenging harmful narratives within practice.

"It really got people to think about the different elements of disruption and how it can come from different people."

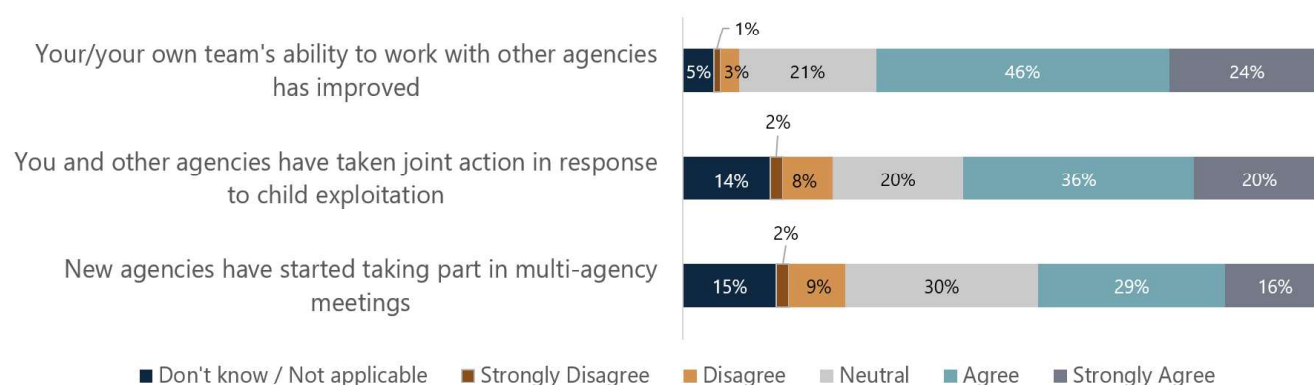
There is increasing awareness of the need to accurately record and share with partners where children are identified as either perpetrators or victims of exploitation.

4.3 Stronger multi-agency working and shared practice

Professionals who engaged in training reported planning to improve coordination across agencies, including more proactive information sharing and ensuring the right partners are “in the room” (e.g., licensing, children's services, education) following an intervention from the Programme.

APS respondents (70%) report that their team's ability to work with other agencies has improved as a result of engaging with the Programme. Around half of respondents (56%) agree or strongly agree that agencies have taken joint action in response to child exploitation and 45% have started taking part in multi-agency meetings as a result of the Programme.

Figure 6: Improved multi-agency working (APS N=103)



Relationships built through TCS's work facilitated new collaborations, such as linking taxi licensing teams with exploitation awareness resources and bringing police, youth workers and charities together for training. Participants valued hearing from professionals across different agencies and areas, gaining external perspectives and pooling knowledge. Spotlight 1 (above) also evidences multi-agency working. Quote box 4: Examples of the importance of multiagency working

*“Valuable to build perspectives from other LA areas in the North of England”
(APS).*

“...when we talk about county lines and the exploitation side of things... there is some awareness, but further development and knowledge in terms of the role of the social worker and working more multi-agency is needed (partner interview)”

Spotlight 2: The Missing and Exploited Persons Procedure (for the Elizabeth Line)

About this project and the needs it is addressing:

This project involved developing guidance for rail staff on how to respond to missing or exploited children and adults, including how to identify indicators of exploitation, how to speak with missing people and their loved ones and how to contact the police and share relevant information. The work focused initially on the Elizabeth Line, with potential for future rollout across other lines and rail providers.

This project identified a gap in the rail industry's ability to respond consistently and confidently to incidents involving missing people and people at risk of exploitation, particularly when individuals move across a connected rail network. There is no clear process for "crossover" cases (for example, when a person moves from Elizabeth Line to another underground or train line), leading to staff "losing track" of individuals once they moved to another operator or off railway property. It is hoped that further work in this area will help to bridge this gap. The guidance aims to provide:

- Practical steps for staff.
- Questions to ask and considerations for vulnerable/missing people.
- Clear routes to contact the police.

The Prevention Officer produced a first draft of the guidance, bringing together contributions from Railway Children, Missing People, British Transport Police, and the Elizabeth line. At the time of writing, a draft has been shared with stakeholders for their feedback and is due to be published imminently and so changes in practice were not yet evident.

Ways in which the Prevention Programme is adding value:

- Convened and coordinated multiple organisations that previously had not been working together. Stakeholders explained that the Programme moved them from "talk" to "product" (i.e. guidance).
- Took on the practical work of consolidating one-page inputs from different partners into a single guidance document.
- Provided structure and project management, which is described as a "gold standard" of project management.
- Stakeholders believe that if the Programme did not do this work it would be unlikely to have focus, ownership or coordination without the Prevention Programme

Contribution to outcomes and impact:

Although not yet implemented, stakeholders describe what success might look like in 12 months. The following outcomes from the Programme's Pathway of Change are expected to see contribution:

- **Improved awareness of CE amongst businesses.** Train operators (who are businesses) describe being increasingly able to explain signs of exploitation and share resources internally (e.g., with revenue protection).

- **Increased action by businesses to safeguard CYP.** Train operators are confident that the guidance will result in greater confidence of station/control teams to coordinate with the police and with one another as a result.
- **Improved multiagency working.** Partners describe improved communication and more proactive stakeholder contact.
- **Strengthened guidance for teams working on CE.** Stakeholders expect that in the long term, rail staff will refer to the guidance regularly.

What external stakeholders have said about this project:

"I've been able to provide briefings to the teams on the ground[...] much better than I would have been able to previously if I hadn't spoken to [Prevention Programme]" (Train operator).

"I know more than I did because of the contributions from the other parties [working on this project]. So I know more about Elizabeth Line, how they deal with vulnerable people. I can then compare it to other train operating companies, And I think having contacts as well is quite good. So yeah, I would say I've learned something" (British Transport Police).

Wider system issues

The project surfaced wider structural issues i.e. there is no standardised safeguarding approach across TFL lines, no national missing persons database and no communication process for inter-operator communication about missing people. Buses, coaches and taxis were identified as particularly under-regulated areas where exploitation could go unnoticed. This has been highlighted as a key area in the Casey Review (National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, 2025).

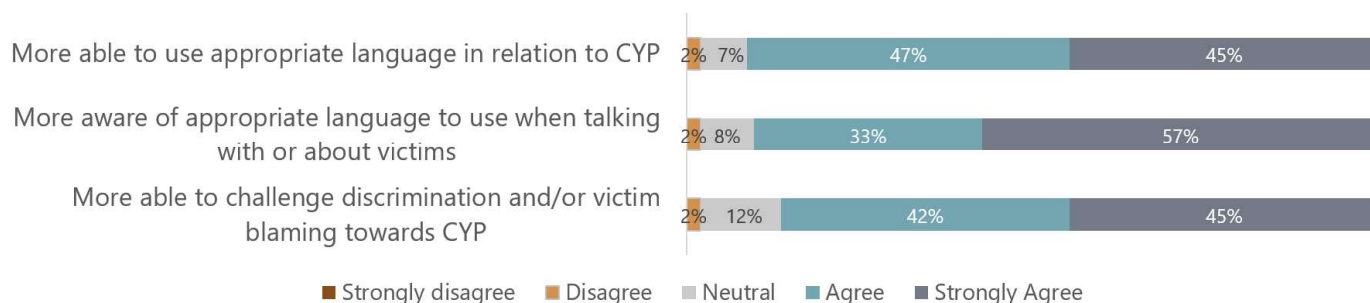
Next steps

Success for the Elizabeth line pilot would mean an increase in reports of missing people and greater staff confidence in responding. If the pilot goes well, the ambition is to roll out the guidance nationally though this will require significant relationship-building, contract negotiations and a robust training programme tailored to each operator. BTP noted the guidance could be adapted for Scotland and other regions with relatively modest effort.

4.4 Improvements in language use and challenge of victim-blaming

Several participants mentioned victim-blaming language as a key learning point, with some making concrete changes to their practice as a result. Some organisations took action, such as creating glossaries, embedding language guidance into practice or changing terminology used in their work. Participants reported actively challenging inappropriate language used by colleagues or other professionals. Although these shifts were often described in relation to specific sessions or interactions, they also matter at a wider systems level because they shape how professionals understand exploitation, talk about children and make decisions in practice.

Figure 7: Improved awareness and strong improvement ability to challenge victim-blaming language (Annual Partner Survey N=103)



Quote box 5: Raising the standards of language use and challenging victim-blaming language.

When asked what has been learned:

"Learning the skills to challenge inappropriate languages and biases has been really useful. I highlight any concerns I find and share them with my manager and it does change things for the young person" (APS).

"Naming rape as opposed to serious sexual assault... he raped her not she was raped" (respondent from the feedback survey).

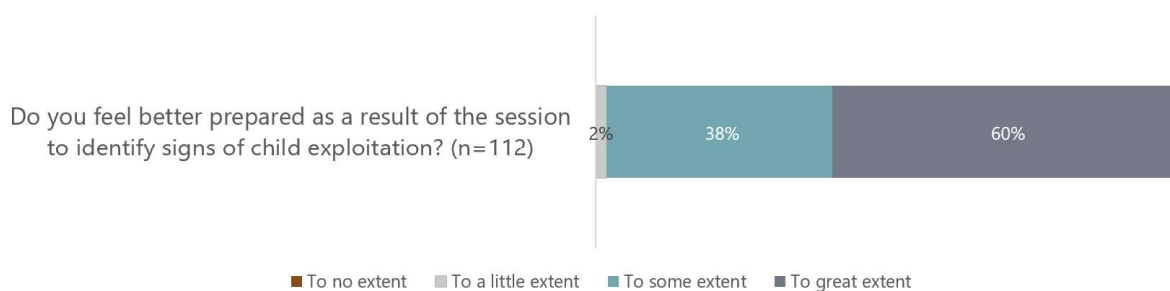
"[The PO] is great at nudging us in the right direction if we haven't quite got language as we want it to be. In some areas it's an area of strength for us and I think what was really nice was we got feedback from [PO] after our last summit and they [PO] said it's the first time they've been to a whole event where the language has been right through the day" (partner interview).

In one Children's Safeguarding Partnership, the Prevention Programme offered significant 'nudging' of language among partners where language was inappropriate and could lead to adultification and victim-blaming. As a result, the partnership co-produced a suite of resources specifically about language and exploitation that signals a shift away from problematic language.

4.5 Business sector awareness is emerging, especially in the Night Time Economy (NTE)

Evidence is strong that the Programme is improving awareness among businesses, especially in the night-time economy, while evidence of embedded practice change is still emerging.

Figure 8: Business participants feel better prepared to identify signs of exploitation as a result of participating (n=112)



81% of respondents to the business-feedback survey (N=112) reported an intention to make a change as a result of participating in the Prevention Programme. When asked what changes they intended to make, several hotel industry respondents gave examples relating to staff training and taking greater care when guests check in to their hotel. At least one hospitality participant made child exploitation training mandatory for housekeeping, front office and security staff (APS).

Quote box 6: Examples of how NTE businesses are implementing learning.

"[PO] supported us to deliver training to the business sector as well night time economy. We have been able to engage with shopping complexes and their security staff which has always been a hard-to-reach area for us" (APS).

"I have included [Prevention Programme] materials in my training. I have worked in partnership with the police and taxi licensing to develop an event to arise awareness about child exploitation and the night-time economy" (APS).

"We now make Child Exploitation training mandatory for all Housekeeping, Front Office, and Security Team members" (APS).

4.6 Improved understanding of inequalities with demand for more support

Professionals report improved understanding of how inequality affects a young person's vulnerability to exploitation as well as access to support.

Figure 9: Improved understanding of how inequality can affect risk or access to support (n=1991)

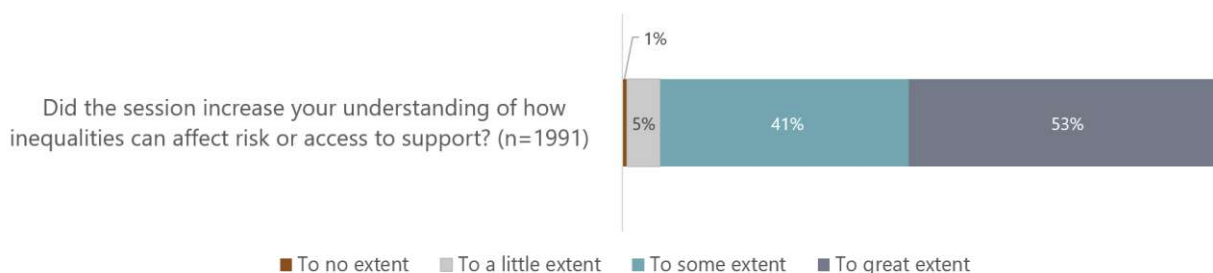
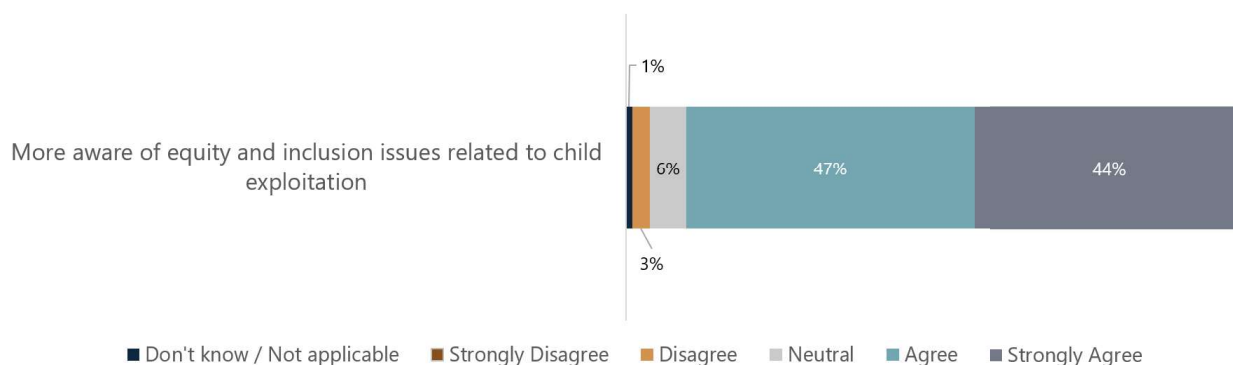


Figure 10: APS data indicates more awareness of equity and inclusion issues related to child exploitation (N=103)



Evidence suggests that the Programme is strengthening professionals' understanding of how inequality and identity can shape vulnerability to exploitation and access to effective support. However, beyond these self-reported shifts in awareness, there is currently limited evidence of consistent translation into practice or organisational change. There are a few examples of change happening, e.g., one respondent (APS) mentioned that they reviewed their organisation's policies to better welcome people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and one respondent plans to put a 'focus on disproportionality' (although no detail was given).

Spotlight 3: Safeguarding Transgender Young People

The #LookCloser Programme of Learning Session on Safeguarding Transgender young people from exploitation is an example of the Programme delivering high-quality, inclusive learning at scale. The session objectives were:

- Support professionals to understand trans identities and how to respect these in their work.
- Explore specific risks faced by transgender children due to discrimination, disadvantage and other systemic failures and how these may lead to heightened risk of exploitation
- Consider trans inclusive approaches to identifying, assessing and supporting children and young people
- Demonstrate the value of a person-centred, holistic and inclusive approach to understanding and responding to exploitation and abuse

The session reached 397 participants and received positive feedback (100% improved knowledge; 93% intention to make change). Participants praised that "everything was concise, clear and it was a good pace," valued the interactivity and highlighted the psychologically safe tone: "Very inclusive and informative. Allowed people to feel it's okay to make mistakes." Others noted the credibility and impact of grounding learning in lived experience and evidence: "Very informative, good use of Youth Voice and statistics," with "quotes from young people... [that] really helped support the message." One respondent

intends to “Put myself forward to be an LGBTQ+ Champion... share learning and resources with colleagues” and another “ensure databases... include capacity to record info such as pronouns.”

There is demand for more work in this area. Partners are asking for more applied training and resources on how exploitation affects specific groups (particularly LGBTQ+ young people and neurodiverse young people) and how unconscious bias can affect professionals’ ability to recognise and respond to exploitation. This suggests that an equity lens is a live learning need and one that may require more sustained, practical support to move from awareness to action. It should be noted that partners aren’t always using language of ‘equity’ but request support around unequal access to support, bias and service accessibility for different groups of young people.

There is limited evidence of an improved use of data to track risk and response in relation to child exploitation. This outcome was included in the Pathway of Change because stronger responses to exploitation depend on the system’s ability to see patterns and act on them. Improving data collection and use was framed in the pathway as a lever for identifying representation gaps and addressing inequities in identification and response.

4.7 Informing guidance at local levels and shaping strategy at national level

The intended outcome for this area of work was originally framed around improving guidance. The evidence suggests that the Programme has contributed to this outcome at local levels (see Spotlight in section 4.3). At a national level, there is emerging evidence of shaping the policy environment in which future guidance, expectations and practice will sit.

This is reflected in the Programme’s contribution to the Fraud Strategy 2026–2029, the Government’s national strategy for tackling fraud over the next three years. The Programme is named in the strategy and commissioning, and the 2026–7 Prevention Programme has a priority focused on delivering against it. This indicates that the Programme is responding to national priorities and is also positioned within the national policy framework for prevention.

The Programme has also contributed to the development of the Crime and Policing Bill, particularly in relation to the new offence of Child Criminal Exploitation, the legal definition of Child Criminal Exploitation, and associated civil orders. The Programme also provided input connected to additional offences, including cuckooing and coerced internal concealment. The Programme has contributed specialist practice insight into the development of national legislation and the definitions and mechanisms that may shape how exploitation is understood and responded to in future.

4.8 Improved capability but barriers limit translation into practice

There is evidence to suggest that the Programme leads to a high level of intention for participants to make a change based on what they learn, but implementation is often shaped by organisational conditions (rather than individual participant willingness). In particular, partners' workforce capacity and resourcing can affect whether learning is acted on and sustained.

87% of feedback survey respondents (N=3,675) reported intending to make a change following a Prevention Programme intervention. However, 46% of APS respondents (N=103) reported that a change had been made. This gap is plausible given that the two measures capture different stages of change: immediate intention reported shortly after an activity may not translate into sustained behaviour change, particularly where individuals face organisational barriers (e.g., capacity, leadership buy-in, or policy constraints) or where implementation takes time.

Professionals report being better equipped to respond to child exploitation in several ways, including improved language use, embedded disruption practices, increased awareness and better inter-agency collaboration. Many professionals reported gaining awareness of appropriate, child-centred language and reduced victim-blaming, with some sharing it broadly with partners.

A recurring concern was that learning from the Programme felt more theoretical than applicable and some faced practical barriers like a lack of resources or staffing when trying to implement changes.

Learning from the Programme, especially in learning sessions, is often only considered or applied at the individual level rather than across whole teams, organisations or strategically.

Quote box 7: Barriers to implementing changes

"I attended a webinar so personally, I have learned stuff and would share that with colleagues but not in a corporate or strategic way that would affect a whole organisation" (APS).

"I faced practical barriers to implementing, such as lack of resource or staffing; Our organisation is so vast and policy led that structural changes are hard, but within the job role we've implemented personal changes" (APS).

A recurring APS response suggests some practitioners felt the knowledge was not wholly new to them. This sits alongside the wider APS finding that 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Programme had improved their knowledge of child exploitation

issues (as explained in section 4.1). Among the 56 respondents who reported not making a change in practice, the most common reason was that they were already using this knowledge in their work (79%, n=44). This suggests that the Programme is adding value in different ways: for some by introducing or deepening knowledge, and for others by reinforcing existing understanding. The Programme's value may be experienced through improved confidence and consistency in practice.

Respondents in interviews and surveys frequently described plans to strengthen early identification behaviours, including increased vigilance and professional curiosity. These responses indicate the session may be contributing to shifts in day-to-day safeguarding attentiveness, which are often precursors to more complex practice change.

Quote box 8: The changes that participants intend to make

"Being more inquisitive and not accept things as face value" (respondent to the feedback survey).

"Consider places and people, be curious, ask questions" (respondent to the feedback survey).

"Explore gut feelings and use professional curiosity" (respondent to the feedback survey).

"Be more vigilant for child exploitation signs" (APS).

4.9 Increased awareness amongst the general public remains difficult to evidence

There is no concrete evidence of the extent to which the general public have increased awareness of child exploitation through this evaluation. While c.55,000 people are thought to have engaged directly with the Programme, most of these are in a professional capacity rather than representing the 'general public'.

Figure 10: Estimated audience numbers - general public

Direct Reach (Audience)	Indirect Reach (Audience)	Media Reach (Audience)
Number that the task was delivered to directly	Number of people sent information (e.g. newsletters)	Number collected from media partner ⁷
c.300	c.70,000	c. 179.33 million ⁸

Nine tasks had the general public as one of the target audiences. Current estimates collected by the Prevention Team suggest that public-facing reach is driven much more by indirect and media exposure rather than direct engagement. But these figures should be interpreted cautiously and not interpreted as strong evidence that the general public awareness of exploitation has increased.

⁷ Media reach figures are provided by Cision and represent potential opportunities to view rather than confirmed views of specific coverage. They are based on audience estimates for broadcast media, publisher/supplier circulation figures for print media, and monthly unique visitor estimates for online publications, which are updated periodically.

⁸ The media reach figure appears unlikely (when set against a UK population of c.70 million), so these estimates may reflect methodological issues (e.g., double counting).

5 Centring Young People's Voices (Youth Voice)

This section (5) responds to EQ2 about the impact and distinctiveness of Prevention's Youth Voice work.

5.1 About the Youth Voice work

The Programme's Youth Voice work is organised around one-off consultations with different groups of young people across the country. The Prevention team goes to young people "where they are," organised through a host organisation, for example, schools, youth and community projects, care leaver groups, refugee and migrant services, addiction services, hospital schools and other local provisions. This helps include a wider range of views from young people who could be at risk but have not reported any experience of exploitation. By adopting a proactive approach to sampling young people, consultations often engage young people who are less likely to be consulted or join advisory panels. Sessions are usually held in person, with online consultations used only when meeting in person is not possible.

All consultations are conducted through host organisations that already know the young people, hold their data and retain responsibility for safeguarding and follow-up. A host practitioner is always present in the room.

The approach is underpinned by the Lundy⁹ framework (space, voice, audience, influence): young people's insights can inform how services and systems respond to exploitation, and young people do not set national Programme priorities.

A key feature of the approach is its emphasis on feedback loops and accountability. There is an intention to 'close the loop' by sharing reports with host organisations and young people, explaining how insights have been used and being transparent where change is not possible. Host organisations receive the report, and young people are provided with a "You said / We did" style summary that explains what was heard and how it is being used, including examples of internal and external influence where known. After each block of consultations, findings are shared internally (including with Prevention Officers, managers, TCS policy staff and TCS senior leadership) and externally by Prevention Officers to the professionals in their networks.

Insights from Youth Voice activity are intended to inform professional practice and system-level understanding, particularly among practitioners and decision-makers working in exploitation prevention.

The Youth Voice model has developed iteratively in response to delivery experience, feedback and contextual constraints and continues to adapt as the Programme evolves. The

⁹ The Lundy model of child participation (2007) is based on four key concepts (space, voice, audience and influence)

work is primarily carried out by the National Youth Voice Worker at the Prevention Programme and supported by the National Youth Voice and Campaign Manager, as well as the rest of the Prevention Team. Young people involved are between the ages of 13 and 21.

A set of themes has been identified (jointly between the Prevention Programme and the Home Office) to be the focus of the consultations and associated reports. So far, the following themes have been the focus of Youth Voice work:

- “Our role in preventing child exploitation” (11 consultations with 74 young people and 250 children and young people at the Young Carers Festival)
- “Tackling financial exploitation” (10 consultations with 126 young people)
- “Gender and Exploitation: Youth Voice Insights” (8 consultations with 106 young people)
- “Insights into education on exploitation” [to be published in May 2026] (8 consultations with 68 young people)

The Tackling Financial Exploitation and Gender and Exploitation reports were published during the 2025-26 Programme, although insight from all themes has been used during this year of the Programme.

5.2 Insights about the Youth Voice work

5.2.1 Driven by values and principles

The Prevention Team’s approach is guided by principles rather than adopting a fixed model. This is seen as more flexible and appropriate than imposing a standard participation framework. This approach ensures that young people, particularly those who are less frequently heard, can participate meaningfully and feel genuinely listened to and valued. The approach prioritises accessibility, safeguarding, and ethical practice, while building young people’s confidence to engage with complex and sensitive issues. The principles that have been frequently described by host organisations, partners and the Prevention Team include:

- Non-exploitative: ethical, protective, non-extractive (no “pain into purpose”)
- Safety: strong safeguarding, care and containment
- Honesty: transparent about power and what change is possible
- Inclusivity: reach those usually left out (beyond the “usual suspects”)
- Agency: choice and consent; consent can be situational/fragile
- Lived experience and professional judgement: professional interpretation/synthesis still needed
- Accountability: follow-through and feedback loops (“you said / we did”)

5.2.2 Strong facilitation and safeguarding

Host organisations and partners consistently described the quality of facilitation as a strength. They highlighted facilitators' ability to engage young people who might typically struggle to take part, including some with additional needs. Where the same facilitators returned across multiple sessions, some partners felt this continuity helped build trust between agencies and participants. Partners also emphasised the importance of strong safeguarding practice, which contributed to their confidence in the sessions and in the organisation delivering them.

In terms of young people's engagement and experience, host organisations consistently reported that participants felt heard, valued and taken seriously, especially among groups who are often perceived as "harder to engage", such as young people with SEND, those with care experience, and individuals who may disengage in other settings.

Quote box 9: How host organisations describe the experience of participating

"Sessions were highly engaging, with creative activities and well managed group discussions. They really stepped up and made it feel slick and professional" (host organisation).

"They [young people] definitely felt listened to... even where some young people would not normally respond, they managed to get them to open up" (host organisation).

"I was happy that they had reached out to us and they are the only organisation that's external from the council that have in the year and a half since I've been running the groups" (host organisation).

The use of clear, accessible, and visual materials was noted as a strength, supporting understanding and sustaining engagement. Importantly, the sessions were described by host organisations as build young people's confidence in discussing complex or sensitive topics, including exploitation, enabling conversations that may not otherwise have taken place.

5.2.3 How Youth Voice work is utilised within the Programme

Prevention Officers described drawing on Youth Voice reports and insights in national learning sessions, presentations, reports and discussions with partners, using this work to foreground young people's perspectives in spaces where professional interpretation might otherwise dominate.

This suggests that the Youth Voice model is a way of bringing young people's experiences, language, and perspectives into professional and partnership contexts. Prevention Officers

value the work for its ability to add depth and challenge to these conversations. Youth Voice findings were actively integrated into Programme activity and increasingly sought out by external partners, including safeguarding partnerships and strategic groups.

While Youth Voice outputs were described by the team and external partners as valued and increasingly in demand, Prevention Officers were realistic about the fact that insight does not automatically translate into action. Barriers identified by Prevention Officers for partners to make direct change in their work included partner capacity, resource constraints and in a minority of cases, scepticism from some professional audiences. This suggests that the influence of the Youth Voice work is shaped by the readiness and ability of wider systems to respond to what young people are saying.

5.2.4 Some partners would value a clearer call to action

The evaluation evidence suggests that Youth Voice outputs are most likely to influence professional practice when they translate into practical “what next” implications. External partners shared that insight does not automatically translate into action, particularly where partner capacity is constrained. This highlights the value of continuing to develop Youth Voice outputs in ways that make routes to use more explicit and support audiences to apply learning in day-to-day safeguarding practice.

Quote Box 10: Example of partner wanting a clearer call to action

“It’s great to have the insights about why people think what they think about law enforcement or will and won’t engage. But actually, I think what we would benefit from in those pieces of insight work is how do we overcome it? What do young people need to have trust and confidence in us? It needs to go further. What are the mechanisms to improve this? What do we need to do...?” (partner interview).

5.2.5 Shaping themes and outputs

There is some evidence that themed outputs may be more useful for professionals when they are shaped around a defined purpose and audience (for example, specific practice settings, decisions or risk contexts). This implies that a stronger set of criteria - ideally with input from young people - for selecting and framing the themes to increase the actionability and uptake of Youth Voice products.

There may be opportunities to build in more structured co-production with young people in shaping the questions, emphasis, and outputs (within safeguarding and ethical boundaries),

so that themes reflect what matters most to young people and increase the likelihood that outputs are relevant and meaningfully grounded in their perspectives.

5.2.6 Appetite from partners for more Youth Voice input

Respondents from the feedback survey suggest that learning sessions could be strengthened through more explicit inclusion of children and young people's voices. These comments were typically framed as enhancements (rather than criticisms), acknowledging both the value of the existing approach and the ethical or practical sensitivities involved in using young people's narratives. Where raised, this was linked to making sessions more immersive and emotionally resonant. Some of the suggestions made by partners, including the use of video or audio recordings, could potentially sit somewhat at odds with the Prevention Programme's ethical model and wider approach to safeguarding, consent and non-extractive participation.

Quote box 11: What partners suggest when asked how Learning Sessions or the Programme can be improved

"To enhance the immersive aspect further, could include hearing directly the voice of the children involved in the story at particular segments" (respondent from the feedback survey).

"Perhaps consider some live examples of children's experiences... you could do an anon recording with their voice only" (respondent from the feedback survey).

"Video footage of YP and their story rather than written examples. Maybe hearing from the YP how they were supported etc." (respondent from the feedback survey).

"Some live examples of children's experiences... it could be impactful but I appreciate this may be difficult" (respondent from the feedback survey).

"Share more information and feedback from young people - giving them more of a voice - not just how the children society see it from a professional" perspective" (APS).

5.3 Contribution to Youth Voice outcomes

5.3.1 Improved awareness of young people's views on child exploitation

Evaluation data indicates that Youth Voice activity is strengthening professionals' understanding of how children and young people experience and perceive child exploitation.

As shown in Figures 11 and 12, audiences commonly report increased insight into young people's views and experiences. This suggests Youth Voice is helping to shift conversations from abstract risk factors towards a clearer, child-centred understanding of what exploitation can look and feel like in young people's everyday lives.

Figure 11: Audiences report that they have an increased understanding of young people's views and experiences (Feedback survey n=1991)

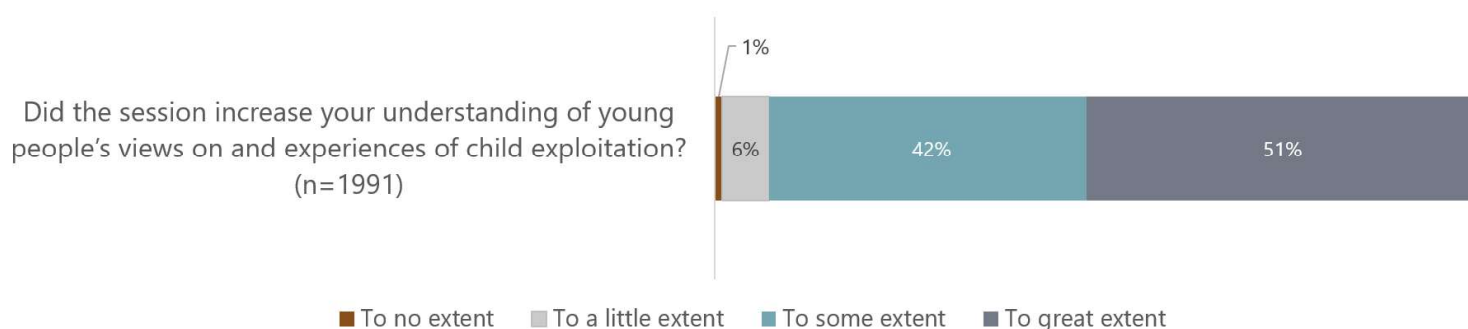
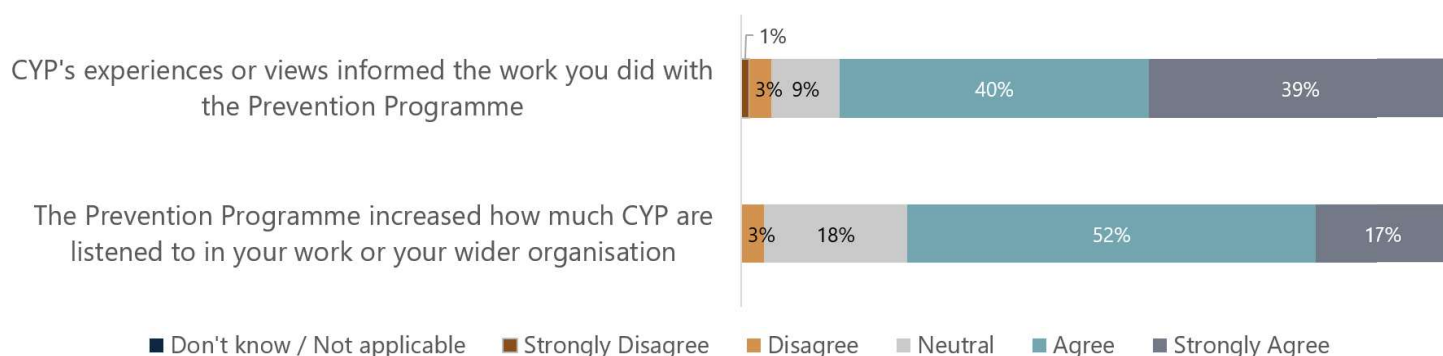


Figure 12: Partners report that children and young people's views informed the work they did with the Programme (APS N=103)



Youth Voice and lived experience were referenced by a small number of APS respondents in relation to changes that they have made, what they found most useful and/or what they would like more of in the future. A small number of respondents explicitly asked for more Youth Voice in future activity.

Quote box 12: What partners are saying about the value of Youth Voice

What did audiences find most useful about the Programme intervention?

"Thinking through the eyes of the young person" (APS).

"Hearing about the experiences of children and young people who I have not worked with necessarily and understanding how best to talk to these young people" (APS).

Strategic partner perspective on youth voice

"It really is eye-opening, because there are things you read that, as an adult working in policy, you would never have thought of. You only understand that when you're speaking to a child of that age" (partner interview).

"I don't think I've ever come across anything before where people actually stop and think, 'Let's ask the children who are actually going through this and get their viewpoint of what's happening'" (partner interview).

A consistent theme in stakeholder interviews was that Youth Voice is filling a gap in the wider system. It creates structured ways for policy and strategic audiences to hear what children and young people are actually saying. It helps strategic audiences understand how things are perceived at different ages and provides language and examples that can be used to inform guidance, communications and conversations with young people.

5.3.2 Strengthened use of Youth Voice in safeguarding practice

Youth Voice insights are actively used to inform policy discussions and shared by the Programme commissioner (Home Office) across relevant government departments. Stakeholders describe the work as providing perspectives they would not otherwise access and as contributing to learning about emerging risks and trends affecting young people.

Respondents from the feedback survey described changes they intended to make in their own work that reflect a stronger focus on children and young people's experiences, even where "Youth Voice" was not named explicitly. Common themes included:

- Being more mindful of how children are spoken about in records and meetings
- Using clearer, more appropriate and less deficit-focused language
- Ensuring the child's perspective is clearer in documentation and decision-making

There is limited evidence of partners committing to specific youth-voice mechanisms in their own work (e.g. advisory groups, co-design, feedback loops), although this is not an intended outcome for Prevention's Youth Voice work.

One partner working in law enforcement had shared The Children's Society's 'Everyone has a role to play in preventing child exploitation' resource with their partnership networks, including law enforcement agencies and third sector organisations, and reported that they

were very useful in highlighting bias and encouraged professionals to reflect on their practice. In addition, this partner was planning to use the financial exploitation resource with banking agencies to highlight young people's experiences of financial exploitation. They reported that this was a very relevant and unique resource that no other agency is producing.

Quote Box 13: How Youth Voice work has the potential to influence the banking sector

"...there's nothing that's been done in the past where we can tell the banking sector how young people are feeling and experiencing abuse on their platforms or the use of their services in some way. So to be able to do that and highlight the victim's voice in ways that we just cannot ...we're looking at this report and at what we can do" (partner interview).

5.3.3 Emerging influence of the Youth Voice approach beyond the Programme

An example of system-level influence was identified following the Programme's Gender and Exploitation report (one of the Programme outputs as described in section 5.1). Following publication of the report, colleagues from the National Centre for Violence Against Women and Girls and Public Protection (NCVPP) requested further detail on the design and delivery of the Youth Voice approach, with a view to adapting elements of the model within their own victim-voice activity.

5.3.4 Highlighting gaps in knowledge among young people and professionals

The process of doing the Youth Voice consultations highlighted gaps in knowledge and professional practice, both among young people and within the host organisations that support them. Many young people, particularly those with care experience, were reported (by their host organisations) to have limited understanding of exploitation prior to the sessions. In this context, the workshops played an additional educational role by increasing awareness of risks and helping young people better understand their own situations. This is not an intended outcome for the Programme, but worth noting.

These gaps were seen as contributing to ongoing challenges in effectively engaging young people and addressing their needs. In some cases, the Youth Voice sessions prompted reflection amongst the partners hosting the sessions and follow-up action, such as feeding back concerns to senior leaders to address gaps in young people's education around exploitation.

Quote box 14: How partners are noticing the gap in their own knowledge as a result

"[There can be] inconsistent understanding of racial issues across social work teams, the persistence of problematic police language, and the difficulty some professionals face in effectively engaging young people" (partner interview).

"I actually fed back to the Leaving Care Service about the session and the director of the Leaving Care Service to let her know that I felt like there was a gap in education around young people's knowledge about exploitation" (host organisation).

Host organisations had an interest in the published Youth Voice reports and could see their potential for influence. One host organisation suggested further practical guides to include, for example, reporting routes, helplines and safety information that could be directly used by professionals and young people alike. More broadly, there was a desire for outputs that contribute meaningfully to real, tangible system change rather than reiterating familiar themes. One host organisation suggested that this work could help inform wider decision-makers, including judges and police, by improving understanding of young people's lived experiences. This is already happening to some extent in relation to the education theme. At the time of writing, the Prevention Programme, through its Youth Voice work, is developing a more practice-focused best practice guide for policing, with the support and buy-in of the National County Lines Coordination Centre (due to be published in May 2026). This will provide a more specific output that draws on young people's views while also setting out clearer recommendations for practice.

6 Programme conditions and their impact

Across interviews with Managers, Prevention Officers, and senior leaders at The Children's Society, a consistent picture emerged of the conditions both contributing to and limiting impact. Participants described a set of structural and operational conditions that made it harder for the Programme to deliver its full potential and to sustain contributions to impact over time. This section relates to LQ3.

6.1 Short planning horizons

Annual funding arrangements, shaped by current government commissioning processes, were described by the team at TCS as limiting the Programme's ability to plan and sustain work that matches its intended priorities. This matters because the Programme depends on long-term relationship building with external partners. Much of the Programme's value depends on continuity, i.e. building trust with local partners and maintaining a credible presence across regions, etc.

In 2025-26, this issue has been particularly acute. The funding (for the subsequent 2026-27 Programme) was confirmed by the Home Office later than usual, leaving only a short window in which to plan and for the team to have notice that their jobs were still available. This has narrowed the space for forward planning and increased uncertainty across the team.

Short horizons reduced confidence about what could be committed to externally and made it harder to signal continuity to partners. This limited the Programme's ability to invest in work that depends on cumulative effort, such as deepening local partnerships and investing in new approaches. Despite these constraints, the team worked hard to deliver the majority of planned activity and sustain all national and strategic projects and publications. Some regional work had to be paused because of staffing gap and some opportunities for further work had to be deferred. For example, disruption projects in the Northwest, Yorkshire and Humber and in the West Midlands were not able to progress as intended, and some requests from police forces to work together with hotels and to provide training in the contextual assessment model could not be taken forward within the year and were instead delayed into 2026-27. The impact of these constraints was felt mainly at the regional level, although they also created additional pressure for managers responsible for maintaining national delivery.

Previous evaluations have highlighted that strong local partnerships take time and consistency to build and that having a known regional lead helps establish the credibility and trust needed to work effectively with networks such as safeguarding partnerships, Pub Watch, Business Crime Reduction Partnerships and other local forums. Earlier evaluation evidence also suggested that when continuity was stronger (e.g. in the 2023-25 Programme), the Programme was better able to invest in partnership-building, learning and experimentation. The two-year funding arrangement appears to have provided relative stability and greater confidence to plan over a longer horizon. Based on reflections shared in

the previous evaluation, this two-year funding agreement strengthened the Programme's credibility with external partners by enabling staff to engage with more confidence about continuity and next steps. It also seems to have created better conditions for the Programme to sustain momentum and invest in activity where value may not be visible within a single year.

By comparison, the shorter and more uncertain funding context in 2025–26 appears to have had wider operational consequences, including implications for staffing stability, retention and management capacity. The team described a context in which uncertainty made it harder to maintain a full team, affected confidence and morale and diverted management attention towards recruitment and maintaining minimum coverage. Short planning horizons appear to be one of the drivers of the workforce instability discussed in Section 6.2.

More secure funding, ideally over at least three years, would therefore be likely to change more than the Programme's ability to "plan ahead." It would improve the conditions for recruitment and retention, reduce disruption caused by turnover and allow the team to commit more confidently to partners. For a Programme built on trust and relationship building, stable funding is a necessary condition for effective delivery.

These planning constraints have fed directly into the workforce pressures discussed in Section 6.2, particularly in relation to retention, morale, recruitment and management capacity.

6.2 Differing internal perceptions of Programme aims

There emerged some differing understanding amongst TCS staff about the Programme's systems-change ambitions and the kinds of activity seen as most valued by the commissioner. The Programme is often described as seeking to influence systems, relationships and practice over time. At the same time, some participants reflected on a tension between this longer-term ambition and activity that is more visible or easier to evidence (for example, large volumes of people accessing one-off sessions¹⁰). Some TCS team members suggested that the annual commissioning cycle may itself contribute to this perception, because a one-year timeframe can make higher-volume activity appear easier to demonstrate than slower-burn systems change. The Pathway of Change developed in 2025 goes some way in providing clarity on direction although specific annual priorities are still likely to be negotiated year-on-year.

These reflections are not a judgment on the current working relationship between the Home Office and the Programme, which is regarded positively. Rather, they point to an opportunity

¹⁰ One-off sessions should not necessarily be seen as separate from systems change. In fact, these activities can contribute to systems change by influencing professional language, awareness and shared understanding, even if their contribution is less visible than longer-term partnership work.

for clearer communication about purpose and priorities, so that there is a shared understanding, both internally and with commissioners, of the balance between breadth and depth in the Programme's aims and of how success should be understood.

6.3 How the Programme fits within wider Home Office-funded work

There are several Home Office-funded programmes focused on exploitation. Some of these, including the Prevention Programme, work with similar sectors such as hotels and other businesses, which creates some risk of overlap or duplication. Navigating who does what has been an ongoing challenge over several years, although TCS staff reported that this has improved in the most recent year and that working relationships are generally positive. There are examples where collaboration has added clear value. For example, joint work with the CSE Task Force on disruption guidance combined the credibility of the voluntary sector with law enforcement expertise, creating greater impact than either could have achieved alone.

Some TCS team members have expressed a desire for clearer understanding of how Home Office-funded Programmes are resourced in relation to one another and how they are intended to work together in a complementary and joined-up way, particularly where Prevention sits within the wider portfolio. Internal stakeholders at TCS expressed an appetite to better understand the commissioner's wider portfolio of funded work in this space and how the Prevention Programme is intended to fit within it. They described a sense that Home Office-funded exploitation programmes are often evaluated in isolation. TCS stakeholders would value a more joined-up view of the Home Office portfolio, i.e. how different programmes complement one another and what success looks like across the whole set, contributing to greater strategic coherence. The current lack of visibility was described as contributing to uncertainty about where the Prevention Programme sits within the broader landscape and how its value is understood.

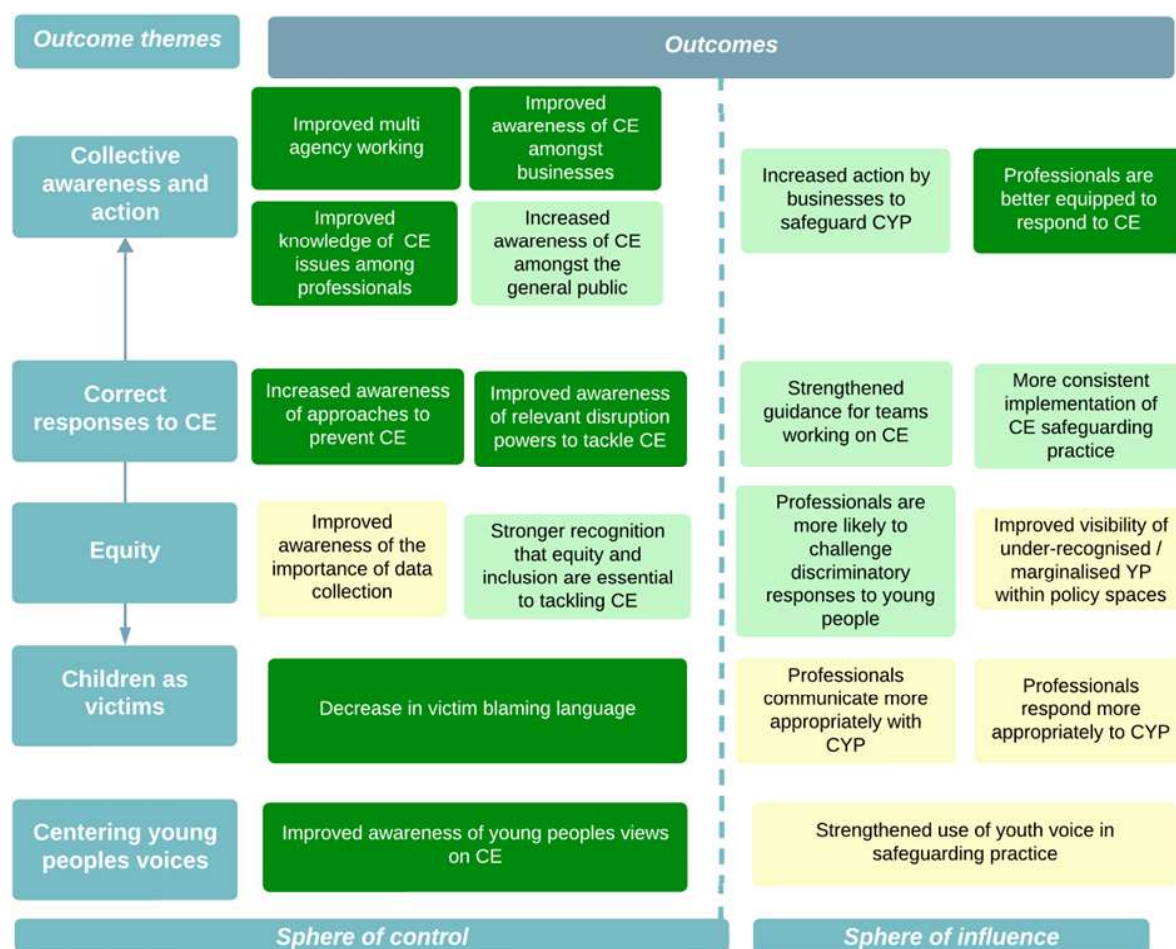
7 Conclusions

7.1 What we are learning about the Programme's Pathway of Change

The findings above suggest that the Prevention Programme is broadly on track in relation to its Pathway of Change. As demonstrated in the previous section, there is evidence of contribution to impact within its sphere of control, particularly around professional awareness, practice knowledge, language use and multi-agency collaboration. There are also early signs of contribution to longer-term outcomes within its sphere of influence, although these are not consistent across all areas (which is to be expected).

Figure 10 maps the main areas of evidence from the 2025–26 Programme against the spheres of control and influence in the Pathway of Change shown earlier in Figure 1, highlighting where contribution appears strongest, emerging or more limited.

Figure 13: Mapping the 2025-26 Programme against the intended Pathway



Key: Dark green = strong; light green = emerging; yellow = limited. See Appendix B for the evidence descriptor guide and definitions.

The evidence suggests several key ways in which change is happening:

- Change for professionals often begins with **language, understanding** and **confidence**. These are all areas where the Programme has strong reach in quantitative terms and good qualitative evidence too. These shifts create the conditions for **practice change**, which is beginning to emerge but is shaped by organisational capacity and leadership buy-in.
- Professionals' understanding of **children as victims** is often one of the first shifts that happens when working with the Programme. People talk about the importance of non-blaming language, viewing situations through the child's perspective and challenging harmful assumptions. These are some of the strongest and most consistent changes described across Section 4. Because this shift happens early and underpins everything else, it makes sense to treat "children as victims" as a foundational mindset change, rather than something that comes later in the Pathway. When professionals start to see children differently, it shapes how they use disruption and how they work with partners.
- One of the Programme's intended outcomes was to improve guidance. However, in the 2025-26 Programme, this has not been limited to guidance and the Programme has contributed to national policy, including the National Fraud Strategy 2026–2029 and the Crime and Policing Bill. This suggests that the Programme's contribution can be understood as **policy influence** in addition to guidance improvement. While the original outcome remains relevant, the form of influence has been broader and more strategic than anticipated. In addition to producing or improving guidance directly (sometimes at local or regional levels), the Programme has helped ensure that learning from prevention practice is reflected in national strategic and legislative developments.
- People are asking for more support on issues related to **equity**, e.g. more training and more guidance on how exploitation affects different groups of young people. A few partners have already started reviewing internal policies or thinking more actively about inclusion. We do not yet have a lot of data or detailed feedback on equity-related changes, and the evidence we do have is uneven.
- **Youth Voice** operates as a cross-cutting mechanism within the Programme's Pathway of Change. Across the findings in this report, the strongest and most consistent changes often begin with earlier mindset shifts e.g. increased ability to think through the eyes of the child, and stronger challenge to victim-blaming language. Youth Voice contributes to these shifts by providing credible, child-centred insight that Prevention Officers can draw on across learning sessions, guidance development and strategic conversations helping to challenge adult assumptions and reduce reliance

on professional interpretation alone. Consistent with wider findings in Section 4, translation from insight to sustained practice change is not automatic.

7.2 Conclusion for the 2025-26 Programme

The strongest evidence of contribution is at the level of improved professional knowledge, confidence, language and some multi-agency practice; evidence of sustained behaviour change and wider system change is emerging but uneven.

Youth Voice is strengthening understanding of young people's experience and is beginning to shape professional reflection and outputs; its distinctiveness lies in the ethical, relationship-based approach and the intention to create feedback loops, rather than "representation" alone. It is valued by partners.

The Prevention Programme is trying to deliver complex, relationship-based and systems-oriented work in a context shaped by annual funding insecurity, budget pressure and staffing instability. This creates strain on delivery, planning, staff retention and the Programme's ability to fully realise its impact.

The consideration points in sections 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5 are informed by the evaluation evidence and are offered for consideration by The Children's Society and the Home Office.

7.3 Implications and consideration points primarily for the Home Office

7.3.1 Align time horizons and expectations with the Programme's goals (reach and depth).

The evaluation suggests there is a continued need for both broad reach activity (e.g., awareness-raising and learning inputs) and depth work that supports implementation, relationship-building and organisational embedding. With reduced budgets and short commissioning cycles, the Programme cannot realistically deliver both breadth and depth effectively, or to evidence depth outcomes on an annual timetable. The Home Office and The Children's Society should therefore agree and resource an explicit operating model that either:

- funds a multi-year programme that can sustain in-depth work alongside reach; or
- if retaining an annual commissioning model, agree on a Programme that prioritises either reach or depth with staffing and evaluation aligned to that choice

7.3.2 Improve understanding of how the Prevention Programme fits within the Home Office portfolio of Programmes

TCS would find it useful to have visibility of a portfolio-level theory of change for all Home Office exploitation-prevention funding that clarifies how different funded programmes / strands complement one another, what each is primarily accountable for (reach vs depth vs

systems change) and the rationale for shifts in investment. This could include light-touch coordination mechanisms (e.g., annual portfolio learning session, shared outcomes/indicators, and a simple “who does what” map) so programmes are not designed or evaluated in isolation.

7.4 Implications and consideration points primarily for The Children's Society and Prevention Team

7.4.1 Value and prioritise products and practical tools

Some of the Programme’s highest-impact contributions come from creating practical tools (e.g., guidance, toolkits, procedures, briefings) that partners can adopt and embed. The team should consider prioritising a small number of high-value products each year (based on evidence of need and where adoption routes are clear). The evaluation suggests that partners want more practical tools, especially disruption guidance and resources on inclusion and inequity, to help turn awareness into changes in practice.

7.4.2 Clarify the Programmes role on data, disproportionality and exploitation

This builds on the finding in Section 4.6 that understanding of inequalities has improved, but that partners want more support to translate this into practice. The Casey Review recommends mandatory collection of ethnicity and nationality data for suspects in child sexual abuse and exploitation cases, alongside improved ethnicity data for victims. While implementation of this sits primarily with government, policing and statutory safeguarding systems, the Prevention Programme should clarify whether and how it can support this agenda.

The Programme might have a role to play in helping local partners understand why better data matters, how to interpret incomplete data responsibly and how to use demographic information to strengthen safeguarding practice.

The Programme should consider mapping the existing support landscape around ethnicity, nationality and exploitation data. This would help clarify what is already being provided by national bodies, policing, safeguarding partnerships and specialist organisations, and where there are gaps. The Programme could then define a focused and credible role that complements existing provision, rather than duplicating it or taking responsibility for areas outside its remit. Clarifying this role would help add value to the implementation of the Casey Review recommendations.

7.5 Implications and considerations points shared for both Home Office and TCS

7.5.1 Invest further in Youth Voice as a distinctive mechanism for impact.

The evaluation suggests Youth Voice is one of the Prevention Programme’s most distinctive and valued contributions across the wider Home Office portfolio of exploitation

programmes. It strengthens professional audiences' ability to "think through the eyes of the young person" and respondents consistently value this insight (including real-life examples and case-based learning) that makes safeguarding responses more child-centred and reflective. The Home Office and The Children's Society should consider increased investment in the Youth Voice strand to protect its ethical delivery model (safe facilitation, safeguarding and feedback loops) and to expand its influence. This investment should enable a stronger pipeline of accessible Youth Voice outputs that can be used across training, guidance and influencing activity. Structured opportunities for young people to help shape the themes and questions explored would ensure that outputs reflect what matters most to them. There may be opportunities for Youth Voice to more routinely inform other initiatives within the Home Office's portfolio of work in the exploitation space.

7.5.2 Clarify and prioritise #LookCloser's target audiences in high-relevance settings (not the general public).

The evaluation recognises the value of #LookCloser as a successful campaign with strong reach but it also highlights that "general public" is too broad a category to guide delivery choices or to evidence outcomes credibly. The Home Office and The Children's Society should therefore agree a clearer target-audience strategy for public-facing work, prioritising "gateway" audiences who are most likely to observe indicators of exploitation and take safeguarding action (for example, people working in or moving through transport settings, night-time economy venues and trusted adults). The campaign should continue, but with an explicit focus on the audiences and environments where the Programme's evidence base is strongest and where pathways to action (reporting, signposting, escalation routes) can be made most concrete.

7.5.3 Continue the regional (place-based) Prevention Officer model

The evaluation supports continuing with regionally-based Prevention Officers to maintain coverage across England and Wales, because relationship-based delivery is central to the Programme's contribution (e.g., embedding disruption as routine practice, strengthening multi-agency working and enabling constructive challenge on language). However, the data also highlights a tension with large geographies and some risks spreading Prevention Officers too thin to sustain the kind of relationship and depth associated with depth outcomes. We suggest that the team considers increasing its number of Prevention Officers in the next commissioning cycle to ensure there is sufficient expertise to support placed-based relationships, training and development. The government has proposed establishing a new national Child Protection Authority to strengthen oversight and consistency in child protection across England, with an explicit focus on improving how the system identifies and responds to harms, including child sexual abuse and exploitation. Over time, local safeguarding arrangements may see clearer national standards, more consistent expectations for learning and improvement and increased requests for timely, high-quality data to support national oversight and thematic learning alongside existing local

responsibilities for safeguarding and disruption. The Prevention Team could be perfectly placed to provide training to support local and regional improvements.

Appendix A - Glossary

Term	Meaning
APS	Annual Partner Survey.
Audience	People who are receiving information, training or awareness raising. Audiences are not actively involved in co-delivery or deeper partnership work. This might include attending training sessions or engaging with one-off communications Their name / job title / contact info would be known to the Programme (e.g. they have registered for something).
CYP	Children and young people.
Disruption	Action taken to prevent or stop exploitation-related harm (for example, actions that target perpetrators, locations, and enabling conditions).
EQ	Evaluation Question.
Host Organisation	An organisation (for example, a school or youth service) that hosts Youth Voice consultations by recruiting/organising young people to take part and retaining responsibility for safeguarding and follow-up.
Impact and Learning Framework	A framework used to guide what data is collected and how impact and learning are assessed.
LQ	Learning Question.
NTE	Night-time economy (for example, venues and businesses operating in the evening/night such as bars, clubs, and late-night hospitality).

Partner	Individuals who are working with the Programme to deliver change. This might include: • Engaged in strategic work • Co-delivering activities • Involved in multi-agency spaces • Receiving tailored or sustained input Their name / job title / contact info would be known to the Programme (e.g. they regularly attend the same meetings or work in the same spaces).
Pathway of Change	A description of how the Programme expects its activities to contribute to outcomes over time.
PO	Prevention Officer.
SCP	Safeguarding Children's Partnership.
SRO	Sexual Risk Order.
STRO	Slavery and Trafficking Risk Order.
Task	A specific piece of work delivered by the Programme that aligns with Programme priorities.
TCS	The Children's Society.
Youth Voice	The Programme strand focused on consultations with young people to capture their perspectives and feed learning into practice, products and influencing.

Appendix B - Evidence descriptor guide

This appendix sets out how key evidence descriptors are used in this report. These terms are intended to support proportionate interpretation of findings rather than act as a rigid scoring system. They reflect the evaluator's judgement about the strength, consistency and maturity of the available evidence across surveys, qualitative interviews and other data sources.

Descriptor	How it is used in this report	Typical interpretation
Strong	Used where there is substantial and consistent evidence across more than one source and where the reported change is well supported by the data available. If qualitative themes consistently emerged spontaneously (i.e. without prompting) we are more likely to regard it as strong evidence.	Readers can have relatively high confidence that the Programme is making a meaningful contribution in this area, while recognising that the report does not claim direct attribution.
Emerging	Used where there are credible early signs of change or perceptions of change. But where the evidence is still developing and the change may not yet be fully embedded, sustained or widely evidenced.	This suggests promising movement, but not yet a mature or settled pattern of change.
Limited	Used where evidence is present but narrow in scope, thin in volume, dependent on a small number of examples, or not sufficient to support a stronger judgement.	Readers should interpret this as some evidence of change or contribution but with important constraints on confidence or generalisability.
Uneven	Used where evidence varies across places, partners, themes or types of outcome, so that change is not experienced or evidenced consistently.	A mixed picture: there may be progress in some contexts, but not in a way that is consistent across the Programme.

Appendix C - Annual Partner Survey respondents

