

CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION PROGRAMME 2024-2027

EVALUATION REPORT YEAR 1 (2024/2025)

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July 2025

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Acknowledgements

The Suffolk Office of Data & Analytics (SODA) interviewed and received input from many individuals in the process of this evaluation. We would like to thank colleagues from across the Suffolk System for their time and contributions. Specific thanks go to the Suffolk Police and colleagues within Suffolk County Council (SCC), Public Health & Communities (PH&C), Children and Young People Social Services (CYP) and Youth Justice (YJ).

Terminology

Suffolk's Criminal Exploitation (CE) Programme 2024-2027 is focused on children and young adults. Throughout this report, the term 'children and young people' (CYP) is used to describe anyone under the age of 25. The Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation Panel (MACE) may consider any person up to the age of 25 although the cohort of CYP supported by the CE Programme are predominantly under the age of 18.

SODA recognises that teenagers rarely like being referred to as children, preferring the term 'Young Adult' or 'Young People'. However, when this report refers to 'children' it is using the UK legal definition of any person under the age of 18. This is especially important in the context of criminal exploitation supporting efforts to change the understanding and mindset of individuals and agencies. A child being exploited is a victim, whether or not they engage in criminal activity.

1. Executive Summary

This is the first of three annual evaluation reports covering the Suffolk Criminal Exploitation (CE) Programme 2024-2027. Year one of the programme ran from April 2024 to March 2025. SODA previously evaluated the 2021-2024 CE Programme and the Suffolk Against Gang Exploitation Team (SAGE) in 2020¹.

1.1. Evaluation Methodology

- 1.1.1. SODA has used the Outcome Based Accountability (OBA) approach to evaluate the CE Programme. The OBA focuses on measuring the quantity, quality and impact of a programme or initiative. The evaluation asks: “What did you do?” (i.e., the quantity / effort put into the delivery to achieve desired outcomes); “How well did you do this?” (i.e., the quality of the effort); and “Is anyone better off?” (i.e., the effect / impact of the efforts). For more detail on how SODA is using OBA, please refer to the SAGE report².
- 1.1.2. For this report, SODA conducted interviews with: CE workstream leads; all CE Hub practitioners and manager; the three chairs of the Multi-Agency Criminal Exploitation (MACE) panels; the CE Training Officer, the CE Police Partnership Officer, and the Suffolk County Council Programme management and co-ordination team.
- 1.1.3. SODAs also attended pre-MACE and MACE panels for each of the three areas in Suffolk and attended training delivered by the CE Training Officer, the CE Police Partnership Officer and The Children’s Society.
- 1.1.4. SODA analysed the data on training sessions and attendee feedback, including those from bespoke in-house courses provided by the CE Training Officer and/or the CE Police Partnership Officer.
- 1.1.5. SODA reviewed the activities and evidence provided quarterly by CE Leads in the programme action plan and assessed them against the objectives set at the start of year one (April 2024).
- 1.1.6. SODA collated identifiable data on children and young people (CYP) that are part of any of the CE Programme workstreams, i.e., all those on the Vulnerability Assessment Tracker (VAT), including CYP who have been referred into the MACE Panels. Once the data was collated and linked, the matched dataset was anonymised for analysis (we call this group the ‘CE Programme Cohort’).

¹ SODA’s previous evaluations and reports can be found on the [Suffolk Observatory](http://www.suffolkobservatory.info/soda) www.suffolkobservatory.info/soda

² SODA’s report on SAGE [Suffolk Observatory](http://www.suffolkobservatory.info/soda) www.suffolkobservatory.info/soda

1.2. Summary of Key Findings

- 1.2.1. Leading charities, including The Children’s Society (TCS), the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), and the National Working Group (NWG), continue to think highly of Suffolk for how it deals with criminal exploitation.
- 1.2.2. Interviews carried out by SODA show that the key people working on the CE Programme are enthusiastic, knowledgeable, innovative, and understand CE from the child’s point of view.
- 1.2.3. It is important that the progress made during the 2021-2024 Programme and in 2024/25 is not lost because of staff shortages or changing priorities. The programme must keep innovating and adapting to how CE changes over time.
- 1.2.4. The CE Programme for 2024-2027 started with the aim of putting evidence and data at the heart of its action plan to improve understanding, insight, and accountability. Some steps have been taken in the first year, such as sharing data and creating a hot spot map, but more needs to be done to break down isolated working, to better understand the experiences of children and young people (CYP), to support accountability, and to keep improving the programme.
- 1.2.5. The CE Hubs had up to 2.5 full-time vacancies throughout the first year of the new programme, and the new Hub Manager only started at the beginning of the programme. Consequently, SODA saw a slow start and fewer outreach sessions. However, the new Hub Manager has brought energy and new skills, and the CE Hub staff (both old and new) work well with other professionals. They established good relationships with CYP, parents/carers, and schools. The stronger links between the CE Hubs, some schools, and parent groups are especially noticeable, as is the tailored Bystander training delivered in schools since January 2025.
- 1.2.6. Suffolk’s in-house training, good practice, and knowledge base have been recognised nationally by NWG, NSPCC, and TCS. Most of the training in the first year of this programme has been delivered in-house by the CE Training and CE Police Partnership officers, funded by SPSL. The training focuses on providing attendees with a basic understanding of CE and methods to disrupt. Future training needs to find more ways to enable the child’s voice to be heard and for children’s experiences of CE to be better understood by attendees.
- 1.2.7. Training on the disruption toolkit has led to better engagement and planning at MACE. However, differences in how the three MACE panels work and their effectiveness were noted in the 2021-2024 Programme evaluation and still exist.
- 1.2.8. The planned review of the VAT must happen in 2025/2026 to improve the system and provide a better way to assess the risks to CYP.

1.3. Recommendations

- 1.3.1. *Improve data collection and insight by using and sharing intelligence from more partners*
Different recording systems and work in isolation still limit how intelligence is shared. There is also a lack of evaluation of the information and intelligence at programme level.
- 1.3.2. *CE Leads to provide strong oversight and hold workstreams accountable*
CE Leads must attend quarterly Leads Group meetings (or send someone in their place) to actively guide workstreams, assign tasks, and share insights on national and local issues. The data, intelligence and insight mentioned in 1.3.1 is required to enable better oversight and to guide workstream leads in assessing success and potential changes to the Action Plan.
- 1.3.3. *Encourage more interaction with education partners*
This includes those who work directly with CYP in schools and colleges helping to improve understanding, share information, and use disruption tools. Building relationships with schools has been difficult but could help get a fuller picture of a CYP and create ways to prevent exclusion and keep support in place. Representation at MACE by a child's school is recommended (see 1.3.5.)
- 1.3.4. *Consider the differences between Suffolk areas in the CE Programme*
One CE Programme model is currently used across Suffolk's North, South, and West areas, but these places have different problems, community behaviours, and issues. The CE Programme partners need a better understanding of these differences and more flexibility to develop tailored strategies, especially for CE Hubs and MACE.
- 1.3.5. *Review each MACE panel*
The CE Programme's effectiveness and the variety of disruption tools adopted at MACE varies by area. This may be exacerbated by having the Gangs Team only in the South, how well partners engage in each MACE, and the experience and approach of the MACE Chairs.
- 1.3.6. *Increase partner representation on MACE*
All disruption tools need to be understood and considered at MACE meetings. More partners (such as Trading Standards and Licensing) should learn about CE, disruption methods, and how their agencies can help.
- 1.3.7. *Review the VAT*
VAT scores are regularly disregarded because they do not give enough information or are based on inadequate data. A review is needed to see how the VAT could be made more useful.
- 1.3.8. *Review the CE Programme's approach when the source of exploitation cannot be found*
Some CYP may fail to be adopted by MACE and/or given insufficient support if the exploiters cannot be identified, even when partners in contact with the CYP are sure exploitation is happening. A different approach needs to be considered in order to maintain monitoring.

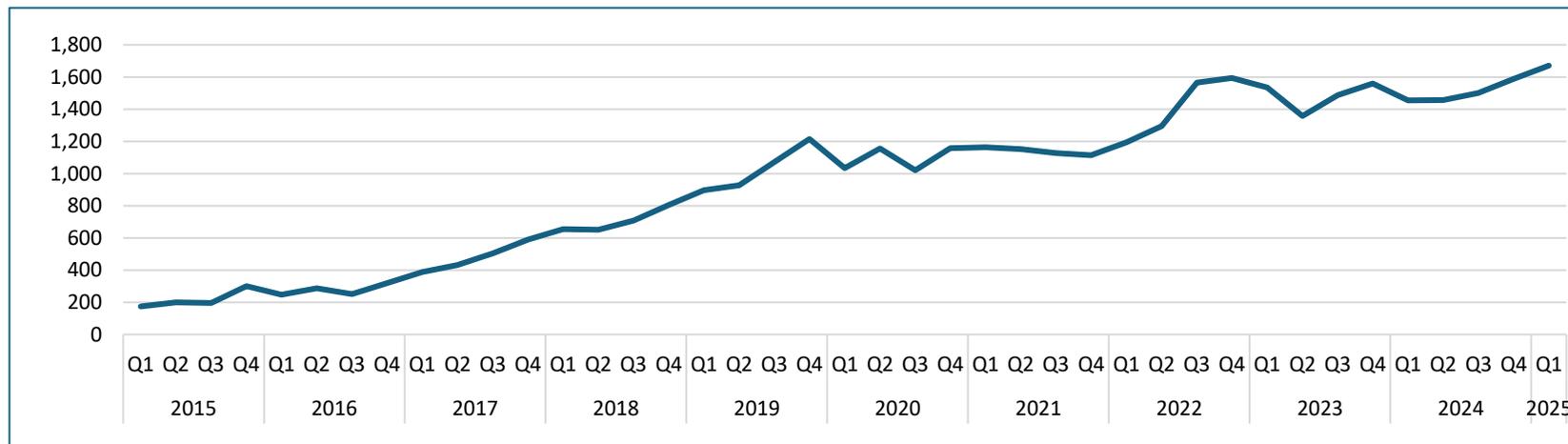
2. Introduction

2.1. The National Picture: Criminal Exploitation - the Most Common Form of Modern Slavery

"The typical understanding many people have of modern slavery involves foreign nationals exploited in prostitution or forced to work in inhumane conditions under threats and violence. Yet the most prevalent form of modern slavery in the UK reported by the Home Office over the past four years primarily involves the exploitation of British nationals, mostly teenagers and vulnerable adults, forced, coerced or groomed into committing crime for someone else's benefit known as 'criminal exploitation'" (The Centre for Social Justice, February 2025)

- 2.1.1.1. Potential victims of modern slavery in the UK who come to the attention of authorised first responder organisations are referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM)³. In January-March 2025, the highest number of children (1,671) were referred into the NRM in one quarter since the mechanism began⁴. 80% of these were male and 20% female. The primary nationality of those referred was British.

Figure 1: Number of children in the UK referred to the NRM, quarterly 2015-2025 (Source: Home Office)



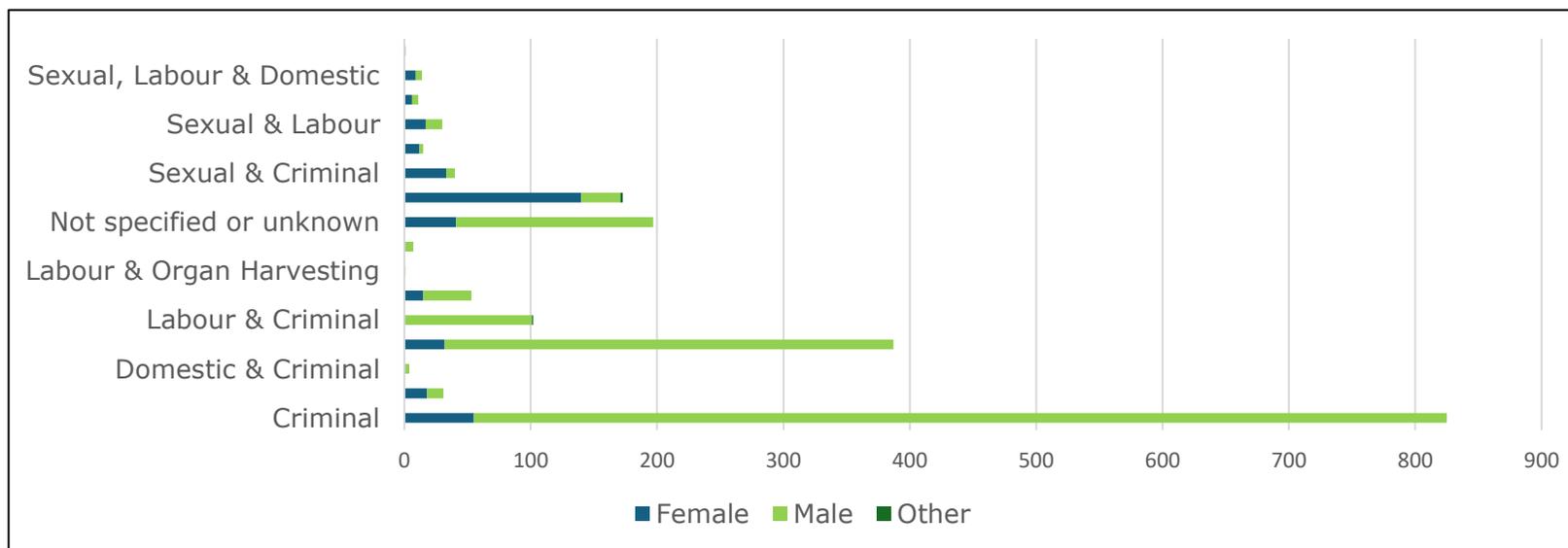
- 2.1.1.2. Criminal exploitation accounts for the vast majority of child exploitation detailed on NRM referrals, either on its own or with other forms of exploitation (e.g. sexual and/or labour). Historically, drugs have been connected to most cases of child CE and most have therefore involved County Lines - the use of a dedicated phone line by organised criminal

³ First Responder Organisations include local authorities, police forces, specific government agencies and authorised Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

⁴ [Home Office Modern Slavery: NRM and DtN Statistics, January to March 2025](#), published May 2025

gangs (OCGs) to move Class A drugs from key towns and cities into more rural areas. Of the 478 county lines referrals to the NRM in the first quarter of 2025, 77% were for male children (under 18 at the time of the referral).

Figure 2: Number of NRM referrals of children to be investigated by police forces in England, by exploitation type and by gender, January-March 2025 (Source: Home Office)



- 2.1.3. Over the last few years, exploitation of children has become increasingly localised and subtle, with drugs and “cuckooing” tactics prevalent. Research and intelligence gathering are revealing more varied and overlapping forms of CE. These include forced cannabis cultivation; carrying weapons; financial exploitation; puppy farms; shoplifting, pickpocketing and busking.
- 2.1.4. Technology is helping to facilitate the change and to increase the opportunities for CE. Burner phones, used to run County Lines, are no longer necessary as encrypted social media apps such as Snap Chat and WhatsApp are commonplace for secondary school-age children and ‘get rich quick’ social media advertisements entice recruits while initially masking criminal operations. Internet-enabled games consoles and laptops provide further routes to target and befriend CYP.
- 2.1.5. The Police, Crime and Policing Bill (also referred to as the Crime and Policing Bill) is being progressed through Parliament and if passed, will receive Royal Assent in 2025. The Bill provides for the following to tackle child criminal exploitation (CCE), potentially strengthening police powers to arrest and disrupt during the second year (2025/2026) of this CE Programme:

- A new standalone offence for adults (18 or over) who exploit children (under 18) to commit crimes. They will face up to 10 years' imprisonment and/or a fine.
- Child Criminal Exploitation Prevention Orders (CCEPOs) which can be imposed on individuals (even without criminal conviction) to stop contact with children, restrict access to certain areas or communications. Breaching a CCEPO would carry up to 5 years in prison.
- Victims would automatically qualify for special measures during court proceeding, e.g. giving evidence via video or from behind screen, thereby lessening the burden for young or vulnerable witnesses.
- The new child criminal exploitation offence will be listed under "criminal lifestyle offences" in the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, enabling the confiscation of offenders' assets, reflecting the seriousness of exploiting children.

2.2. CE Programme Action Plan & Structure

2.2.1. The Action Plan for the CE Programme 2024-2027 was developed and agreed by CE Leads in April 2024. The Plan created a data and intelligence core with five workstreams to support key elements to tackle CE, specifically:

- Improving outcomes for young people
- Safeguarding against exploitation
- Enhancing understanding of the issues
- Tackling Organised Crime Groups (OCG)
- Taking a coordinated approach

2.2.2. The CE Leads set their own workstream objectives, activities and proposed evidence measures from the high-level key elements. The five workstreams are:

- Prevention and Early Intervention
- Innovation and Learning
- Safeguarding Adolescents
- Breaking Drug Supply Chains
- Programme Management

2.2.3. Funding from Suffolk Public Sector Leader (SPSL) finance the CE Hubs, a CE Training Officer and a CE Partnership Officer. The latter is a serving Suffolk Police officer. The CE Training Officer is an existing Suffolk County Council Public Health & Communities officer and sits within the Innovation and Learning workstream. Both roles involve considerable communication with all workstreams within the CE Programme.

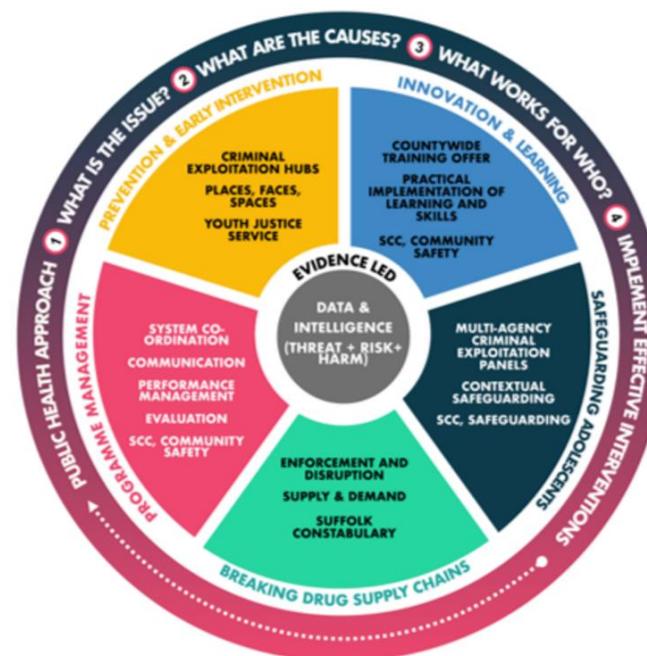


Figure 3: The Suffolk CE Programme 2024-27

- 2.2.4. The workstream structure is expected to remain the same for the duration of the CE Programme 2024-2027. However, the workstream objectives and activities should be amended at least annually to reflect continuous review (including the CE Programme Evaluation) and resource changes.

3. Findings by Workstream

3.1. Prevention & Early Intervention

- 3.1.1. The objective of the Prevention and Early Intervention workstream is to create safe environments for CYP by disrupting exploitation. To achieve this goal, the planned activities for the CE Hubs in 2024/2025 were:
- Work with individuals and peer groups at risk or experiencing exploitation
 - Divert CYP into positive activities
 - Educate & support parents via a programme developed by Pathfinder⁵
 - Deliver the Bystander training to create a positive environment in schools
 - Undertake neighbourhood assessments for partnership response
 - Deliver or facilitate a group work programme based on the Families Learning About Thinking Skills (FLATS) programme⁶ for CYP close to exclusion or on a reduced timetable.
- 3.1.2. Despite being understaffed throughout the year, the CE Hubs continued to build good relationships with CYP and local schools. The workstream has delivered on all activities set at the beginning of the programme, except for the FLATS training, which is now scheduled for FY 2025/26.
- 3.1.3. The CE Hubs have provided fewer outreach sessions in 2024/2025 than in 2023/2024, with numbers dropping off in the second half of 2023 from an all-time high of 82 in June 2023 to a low of 13 in December 2023. The reduction in the number of sessions delivered, particularly one-to-one sessions, is attributed to staffing shortages and the CE Hubs not operating at full capacity.
- 3.1.4. The reduction in outreach sessions has been disproportionate across Suffolk's districts and borough, with engagement in Babergh seeing further reduction to pre-2022/23 levels.

⁵ SODA's report on previous programme outlines the [Pathfinder](#).

⁶ FLATS was first used by the SAGE team, and details are included in SODA's [SAGE report](#).

Figure 4: Number of CE Hubs Outreach Sessions in Suffolk, July 2021 - March 2025 (Source: CE Hubs)

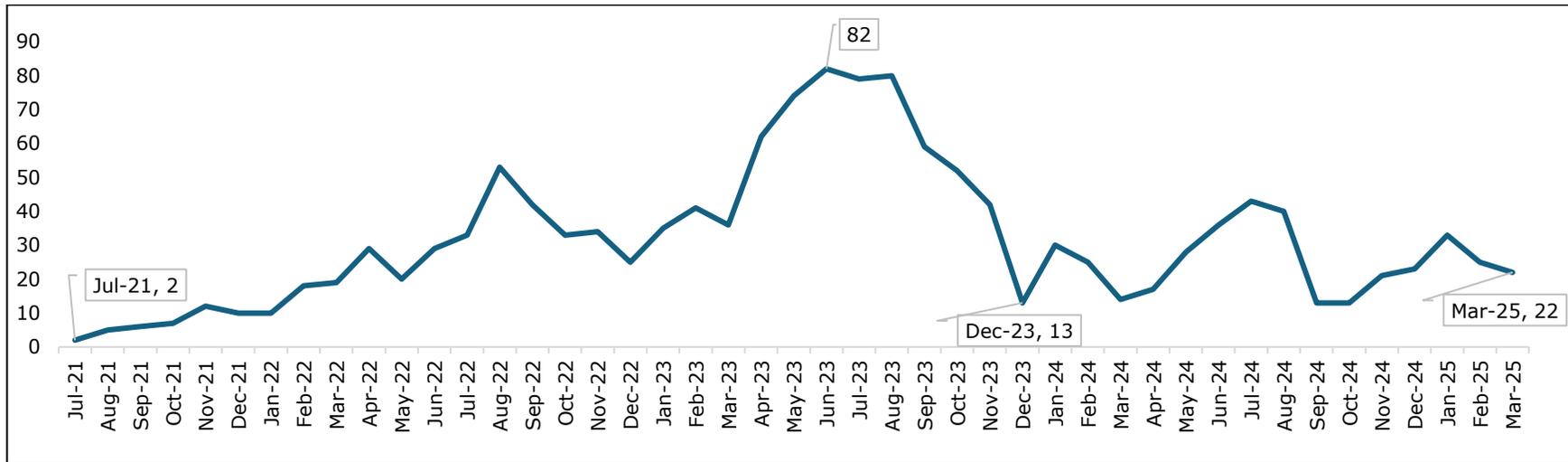
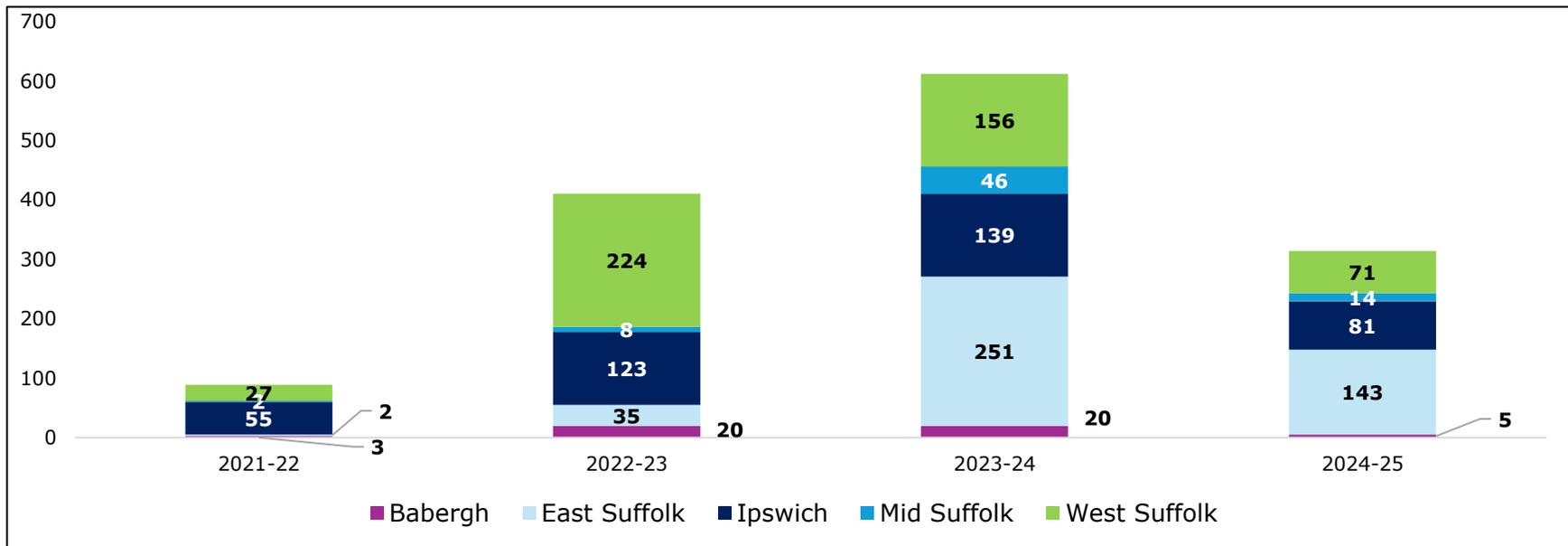
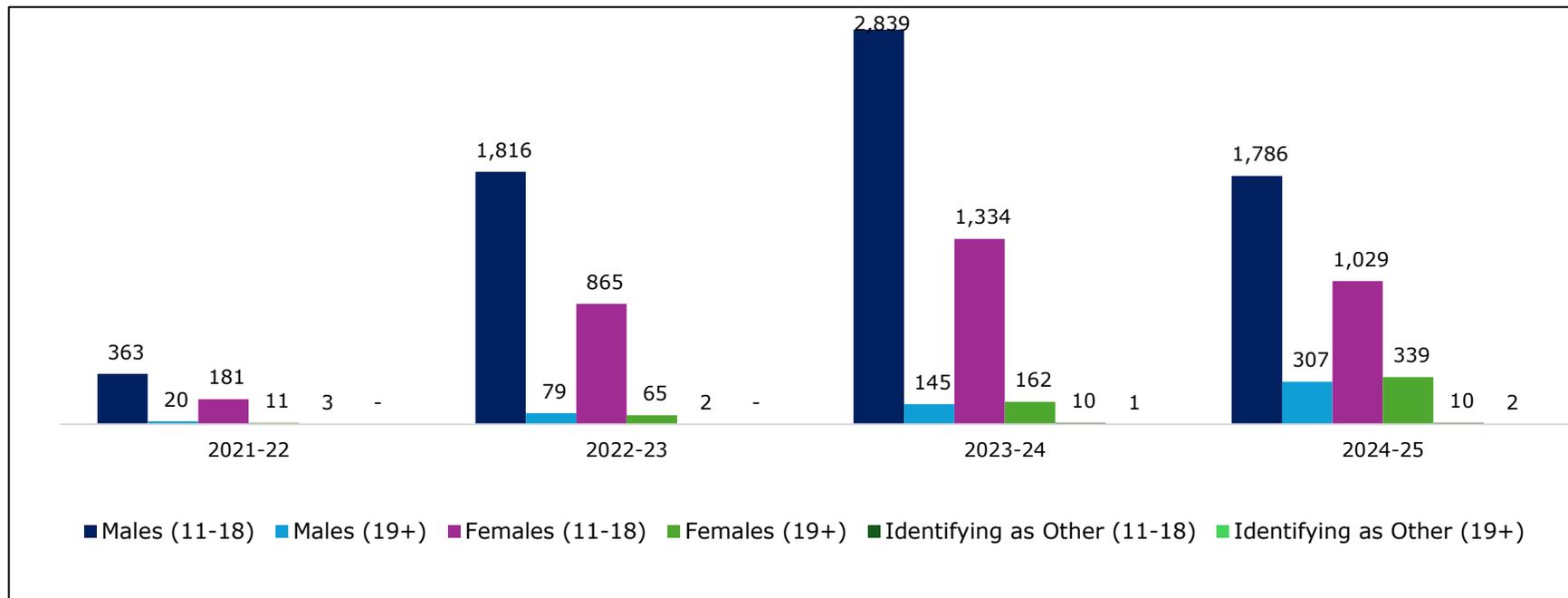


Figure 5: Number of CE Hubs Outreach Sessions in Suffolk Districts & Borough, by Financial Year (Source: CE Hubs)



3.1.5. The number of CYP engaged during outreach sessions fell by 23% in 2024/25 compared to 2023/24, despite the uplift in January-March 2025 attributed to the rollout of the Bystander training. The training, which was revised and tailored in-house specifically for Suffolk, has received recognition from the National Working Group. By the end of March 2025, the Bystander training had been delivered to groups of CYP in seven schools across the county: County High School and King Edward VI School, Bury St Edmunds; Stowmarket High School; Newmarket Academy; Claydon High School; Thomas Gainsborough Sixth Form; Woolpit Academy; and Olive Academy, Stowmarket. SODA notes that these schools are predominantly in the west of Suffolk and will examine the engagement with schools and disparities between areas during the second year of the programme.

Figure 6: Number of CYP engaged in CE Hubs Outreach Sessions, by Gender and Age, Suffolk, by Financial Year (Source: CE Hubs)



3.1.6. The CE Hubs have increased the proportion of contextual safeguarding assessments in 2024/2025 to over 10% of the total number of outreach sessions. Further, at almost half of all outreach sessions contextual safeguarding or CE awareness was raised.

Figure 7: Number and Proportion of CE Hubs Outreach Sessions that Included a Contextual Assessment, Suffolk, by Financial Year (Source: CE Hubs)

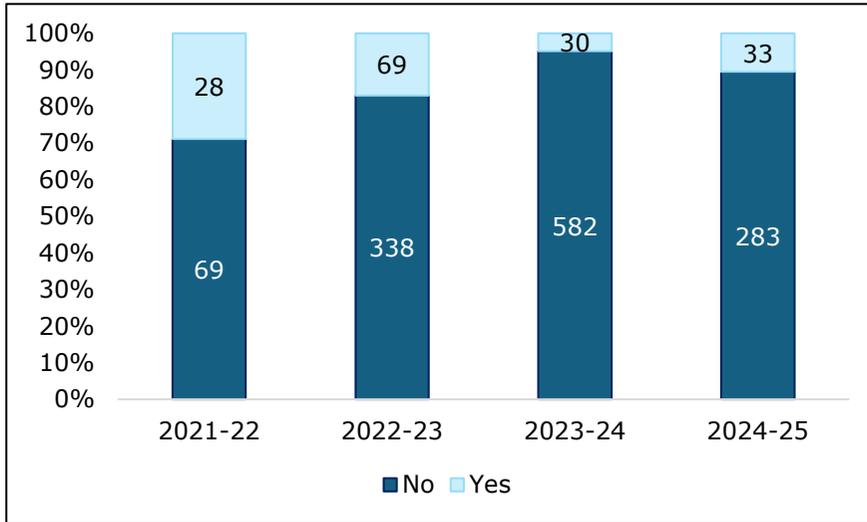
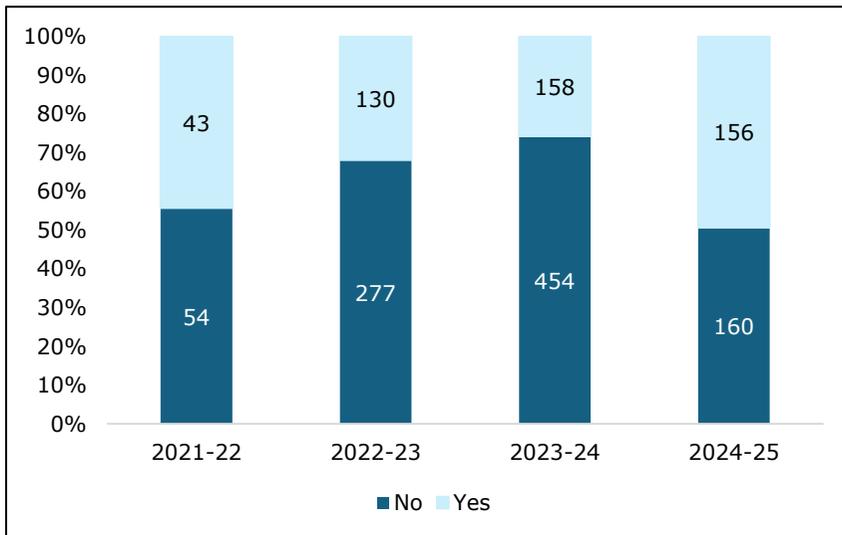


Figure 8: Number and Proportion of CE Hubs Outreach Sessions at Which Contextual Safeguarding and/or CE Awareness was Raised, Suffolk, by Financial Year (Source: CE Hubs)



- 3.1.7. The 2021-2024 CE Programme Evaluation found that many parents would welcome the opportunity to share experiences and talk to other parents and the CE Hubs planned specialised parent support throughout the county. These parent groups, mostly attended by mothers, are now well-established in Ipswich and Bury. CE Hubs have also worked closely with Suffolk County Council education colleagues to establish well attended ad hoc parent drop-in events. This is expected to develop further in the second year of the CE Programme. It is noted, however, that establishing a parent group in Lowestoft proved more difficult; anecdotally, parents/carers appear to be reluctant in sharing experiences, and a different approach is being considered by the CE Hubs. SODA will evaluate any new approaches in the next annual report.

3.2. Innovation & Learning

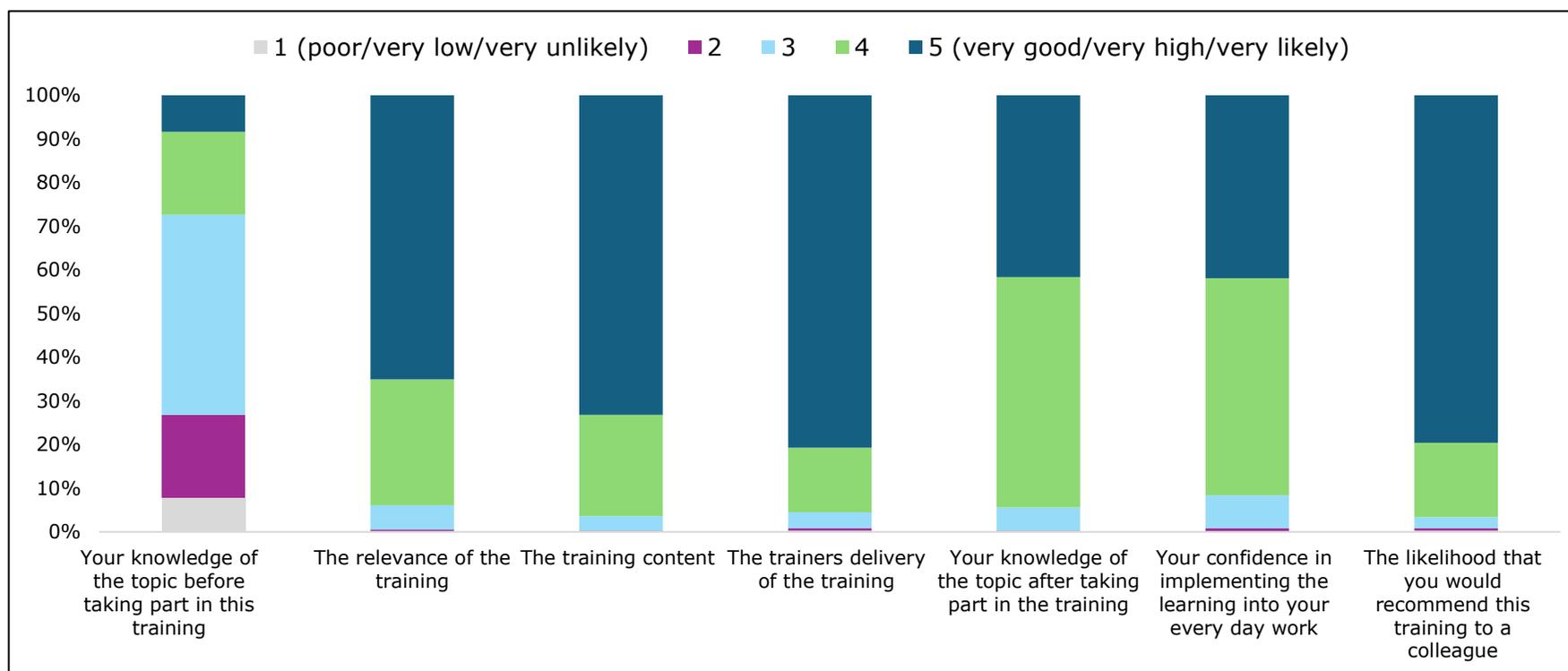
- 3.2.1. The objective of the Innovation & Learning workstream has been to ensure the Suffolk system is kept up to date with current trends in Modern Slavery and criminal exploitation to enable early identification, disruption and safeguarding of vulnerable people & communities and to ensure the system is coordinated. Suffolk's in-house training and insight into CE continues to attract national recognition from the National Working Group, the NSPCC and the Children's Society. The two SPSL-funded posts are working as a critical friend to the Children's Society on new immersive training for practitioners to look at how better to disrupt exploitation and support vulnerable CYP. They are also working with the National Working Group on CE training for taxi drivers and the safeguarding of passengers. SODA attended one of the in-house courses for new police staff as part of the evaluation and found that the knowledge and insight of the CE Training Officer and CE Partnership Officer was fundamental in the upskilling of the Suffolk System.
- 3.2.2. In 2024/2025, the CE Training Officer and/or the CE Partnership Officer delivered 26 bespoke face-to-face training sessions to 430 attendees from a wide range of organisations. If all training had been developed and delivered by external trainers, SODA estimates a cost of between £26k and £52k.

Figure 9: Training Sessions Developed and Provided by the CE Training Officer and/or the CE Partnership Officer (Source: SCC)

Date	Training title	Workstream	Target audience	Attendees
04/09/2024	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	Suffolk Police Contact & Control Room (CCR) Staff	13
10/09/2024	CE Workshop	Criminal Exploitation	Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Migrant (RASM) Whole Team	14
17/09/2024	CE Workshop Besopke for SEND	Criminal Exploitation	SEND Services	86
17/09/2024	CE Workshop Besopke for Probation	Criminal Exploitation	Ipswich Probation Team	6
17/09/2024	Venue Hire	Prevent	Suffolk and Essex	5
18/09/2024	CE workshop bespoke for Probation	Criminal Exploitation	Bury Probation Team	3
24/09/2024	CE Case Study Workshop	Criminal Exploitation	ACT Volunteers	15
23/10/2024	Venue Hire	Prevent	Suffolk and Essex	1
21/11/2024	CE workshop bespoke for IRO's	Criminal Exploitation	Independent Reviewing Officers/Contextual Safeguarding Chairs	16
21/11/2024	Venue Hire	Prevent	Suffolk and Essex	11
25/11/2024	CE workshop besopke for CHB Partners	Criminal Exploitation	Felixstowe Clear Hold Build Partners	21
04/12/2024	CE workshop bespoke for Probation	Criminal Exploitation	Lowestoft Probation	12
06/12/2024	CE workshop bespoke for Able Health Care	Criminal Exploitation	SEND Residential Settings	11
12/12/2024	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	Police Contact & Control Room Staff	35
16/12/2024	Venue Hire	Prevent	Suffolk and Essex	8
09/01/2025	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	CCR	9
15/01/2025	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	CCR	30
22/01/2025	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	CCR	6
26/01/2025	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	CCR	32
06/02/2025	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	CCR	33
12/02/2025	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	CCR	6
25/02/2025	Bespoke CE for MASH Teams	Criminal Exploitation	MASH	14
03/03/2025	Bespoke CE workshop for The Mix	Criminal Exploitation	The Mix Youth / Schools Work Teams	6
19/03/2025	Bespoke CE workshop for DWP	Criminal Exploitation	DWP Ipswich	15
25/03/2025	Bespoke workshop for SIT	Criminal Exploitation	SIT Teams	16
31/03/2025	Bespoke CE for Police CCR Teams	Criminal Exploitation	CCR Digital Team	6

- 3.2.3. Feedback, based on 385 out of 430 (90%) attendees to the training sessions remains very positive, with 97% of participants likely to recommend the training to a friend or colleague. Most attendees also saw the training as relevant, and effective as 94% said they had a (very) good knowledge of the topic at the end of the sessions. Prior to the sessions, only 27% thought they had a (very) good level of understanding.

Figure 10: Feedback on bespoke training delivered as part of the CE Programme, 2024/25 (based on 90% response rate)



- 3.2.4. Obtaining post-training feedback several months after course delivery remains challenging, making it difficult to assess the longer-term impact on participants' practice. SODA will review this again in year two of the programme.
- 3.2.5. SODA found that most training participants had no knowledge or very limited knowledge of CE at the outset and therefore supports the view that the current level at which the courses are set is the correct one. Focus on addressing stereotypes, challenging misconceptions, and how the disruption toolkit might be used are the foundations for an understanding of the concept of CE. Given the strong CE training offer, SODA recommends that all organisations incorporate some of the CE training materials into mandatory training courses on safeguarding. Further, SODA recommends that all front-line staff in direct contact with CYP or working on services that could impact CYP should attend the initial training. This would ensure that the concept of CE is understood and recognised across the Suffolk System to the level that domestic abuse is now understood. It would also ensure that CE prevention, education and disruption becomes part of existing services and interventions, moving it into a more 'business as usual' state – this is vital given that the current funding model may change at the end of the 2024-2027 programme.

3.3. Safeguarding Adolescents

- 3.3.1. The primary objectives of the Safeguarding Adolescents workstream is to ensure that the wider system is capable of capturing intelligence and that assessment tools are fit for purpose and the effectiveness of disruption is maximised. To achieve these objectives, the workstream planned the following activities and have successfully carried out many of them:
- Work with Customer First (CF) to develop a SPOC (Single Point of Contact) opportunity and build greater awareness of contextual risk
 - Embed the contextual safeguarding model in the case management system Liquid Logic
 - Assessment tools to be reviewed and developed and risk assessment for contextual safeguarding to be embedded in CYP
 - Hold contextual safeguarding conferences for CYP at significant risk of extra-familial harm
 - Develop a quarterly report of MACE and VAT (e.g. CYP discussed, issue types, referrals)
 - Review of VAT use
- 3.3.2. Customer First training is ongoing and regular monthly meetings between Customer First and the Missing and CE Coordinators began at the end of 2024. However, there are several obstacles to the sharing of intelligence. The absence of an accessible report or dashboard means that information cannot be shared easily. This is a similar issue for hot-spot mapping of places for CYP. Much of the information is siloed so collaboration relies on manual emailing by the CE Coordinator. The CE workstreams need to prioritise the collation of intelligence to provide the necessary evidence to inform the CE Programme (see 3.5. Evidence Led: Data & Analysis).
- 3.3.3. Contextual Safeguarding Conferences (CSC) are being held for children at risk of significant risk from extra-familial harm and processes are becoming embedded. As CSCs become more common place, SODA will evaluate the quality of the conferences, in particular how the voice of the parent/carer is used.
- 3.3.4. SODA observed several pre-MACE and MACE Panels and recognises that the approach, engagement and membership differs between areas, with the South more equipped to deliver the disruption toolkit than the North or West. The approach of the chairs and the engagement of other panel members differed, with chairs in the North and West regularly needing to extract commitments and accountability from Panel members, while in the South discussion flowed more freely and accountability was offered. During SODA's interviews with key MACE members, the inconsistencies between MACE panels was raised regularly. The most common suggestion has been for one chair to sit on all three MACE Panels to provide a similarly strong approach.
- 3.3.5. Suffolk has taken part in a Home Office pilot initiative with the Children's Society to develop Disruption Reflective Self-Assessment. MACE Panel members have provided assessments of their area MACE. The Home Office report is due to be published in mid-2025, and SODA will use the report for the next part of the evaluation.

- 3.3.6. Charts showing basic detail on CYP (including age, gender, legal status and type of exploitation concerns raised for the CYP discussed) have been produced in 2024/2025 alongside hot-spot mapping. SODA recognises that this is a step forward but would look to more collaborative and more detailed information being provided in 2025/2026 as part of an evidence-led approach.
- 3.3.7. The Safeguarding Adolescents workstream recognises that despite attempts to promote the VAT, it is not being used by partners as much as it should be. Feedback to MACE and as part of the Reflective Self-Assessments is that the VAT score does not always provide a true reflection of a child's circumstances. SODA noted that during three pre-MACE panels and three MACE panels, a VAT score was only mentioned in passing in two cases for CYP. SODA supports the aim of carrying out a full review of the VAT in 2025/26 and comparing the usage with other local authorities.
- 3.3.8. The CE Coordinator and the Missing Child Coordinator are key roles in the CE Programme. SODA witnessed the CE Coordinator providing strong support to the MACE Chairs and providing direction on disruption when panel members were unsure. The CE Coordinator also provided a central role in collating and sharing information with the CE Training Officer, the CE Partnership Officer and the CE Hubs. As has been mentioned in SODA's evaluations of the 2021-2024 CE Programme, the skills and personalities of individuals in these key positions is one of the strengths of the CE Programme. SODA will continue to monitor this, following the recent personnel changes to the CE Coordinator and Missing Coordinator posts.

3.4. Breaking Drug Supply Chains

- 3.4.1. The objective of the Breaking Drug Supply Chains workstream is to ensure Suffolk has effective mechanisms between partners to support sharing of information concerning drug supply and that communities are resilient to organised criminality linked to drug supply.
- 3.4.2. Outcomes and successes in 2024/25 have been:
- Strong and consistent collaboration and communication by the CE Partnerships Officer with CE Hubs, the CE Training Officer and MACE panel members
 - National, regional and local contexts and development shared with CE Programme Leads, e.g. changes to business model, availability of drug types
 - Use of a variety of civil orders and disruption approaches, including buddi tags, Serious Crime Prevention Orders (SCPOs), interim Slavery and Trafficking Risk Orders (STRO) and a full 5-year STROS
 - Training delivered to partners and the third sector
 - Clear, Hold, Build in Felixstowe and Newmarket
- 3.4.3. There is considerable information related to criminal exploitation collated by Suffolk Police and potentially shareable through the Breaking Drug Supply Chains workstream. Going forward, SODA recommends that the data shared

within the CE Programme Action Plan is more consistent and presented in a format more accessible to other workstreams and the evaluation process. This will contribute to the evidence-led approach (see 3.5 Evidence Led: Data & Analysis) and provide all those involved in the Programme with a better understanding of the Suffolk context in which they are working.

- 3.4.4. Some of the information for SODA's evaluation comes from the quarterly Programme Action Plan submissions by CE workstream leads. SODA found that the Breaking Drug Supply Chain workstream report was incomplete for some of the actions, and in some cases the submission states that data does not exist for the selected key performance metrics. SODA would encourage the Breaking Drug Supply Chains workstream lead to reassess the Action Plan, to ensure that they are able to evidence delivery success and supply data to the Programme.
- 3.4.5. There is considerable expertise within the Suffolk Police Criminal Exploitation and Gangs Unit and collaboration with other entities with the CE Programme is crucial for intelligence sharing. The Unit's geographical limitations add to the feeling that the South area has a better handle on disruption tactics.
- 3.4.6. Due to significant staff changes and restructure, the Breaking Drug Supply Chains workstream was sometimes unrepresented at CE Leads meetings in 2024/2025 and lacked a consistent Lead. A single informed lead is expected at future CE Programme meetings.

3.5. Evidence Led: Data & Analysis

- 3.5.1. There continues to be good collaboration and intelligence sharing within the programme; hot-spots, Police intelligence reports and MACE evidence this. However, more information could be shared, and a stronger evidence base is needed to better track CYP journeys and to monitor the success of the Programme as well as making ongoing improvements to each workstream where identified. The CE Lead for Safeguarding Adolescents has identified that many other local authorities have integrated intelligence that provides a clear and comprehensive dashboard for all parties. SODA supports this assessment and encourages parties to move away from the siloing of information.
- 3.5.2. SODA also supports the suggestion from CE Programme Leads that an Operational Group is formed for the Programme and suggests that data and insight is provided at Operational Group meetings and cascaded. In evaluation interviews with SODA, some operational staff said that they did not know the long-term outcomes for CYP they had supported and would like to know that their work had had an impact. Greater collaboration and data collection on the journeys of CYP will ensure a better understanding and appreciation of context and outcomes as well as providing an understanding of 'what works and what does not work'.

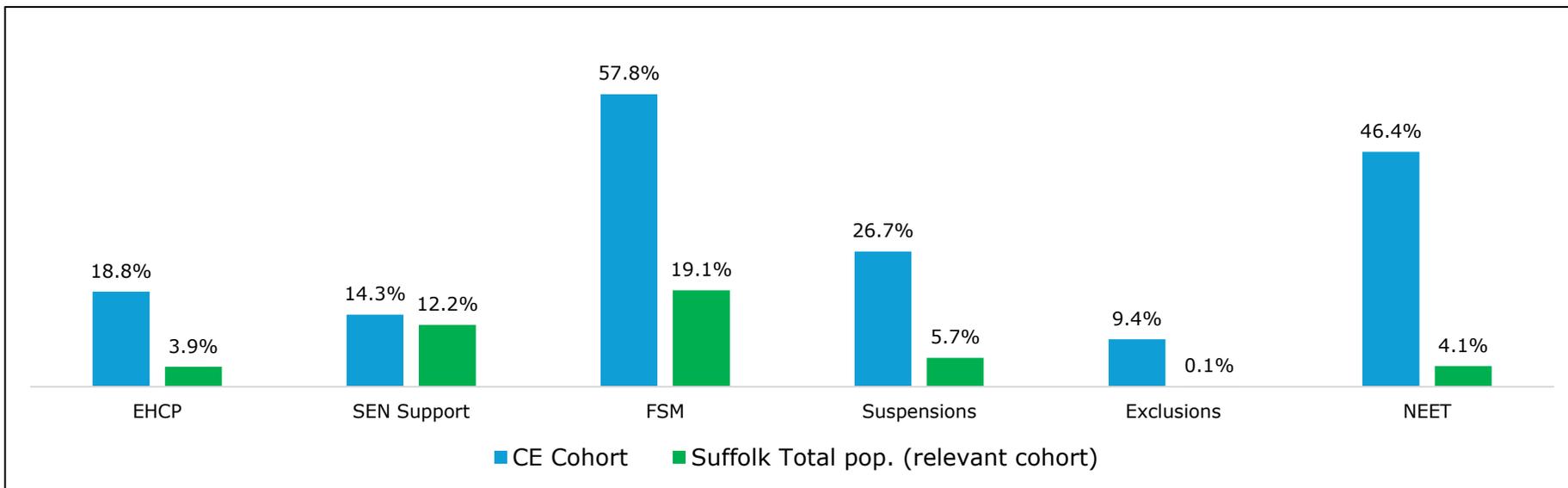
4. CE Cohort Analysis

- 4.1. SODA established an Information Sharing Agreement between Suffolk County Council CYP and YJ and the Police – enabling the identification of CYP that are part of any of the CE Programme workstreams. This included all those on the VAT, those that have been referred into the MACE Panels and all those that have worked with SAGE or the CE Hubs over the past five years. This identified a total of 554 individuals, whose names were shared with Police, Children & Young People Social Services, Education and Youth Justice; to extract any information they may have against any of these individuals between April 2018 and end of March 2025. This data was analysed, and the group is referred to below as ‘the CE Programme Cohort’.
- 4.2. The December 2023 Evaluation of the 2021-2024 CE Programme identified the risk factors for involvement in crime, including poverty level, educational achievement, Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) and temporary and permanent exclusion.
- 4.3. Recent research shows that young people with SEN, particularly those with social, emotional, and mental health difficulties or neurodivergent conditions such as autism or ADHD, are also disproportionately represented among those identified as at risk of criminal exploitation⁷. These individuals often experience challenges in communication, emotional regulation, and social understanding, which can make them more susceptible to manipulation by exploiters. Additionally, gaps in educational support, exclusion from mainstream schooling, and limited access to appropriate interventions have been identified as compounding factors that increase the likelihood of contact with criminal networks.
- 4.4. The CE Programme Cohort are significantly more likely to have one or more of the key risk indicators than the relevant Suffolk population. Notably, although the proportion of the CE Cohort receiving SEN Support (14.3%) is not that much higher than the Suffolk population (12.2%), there is a large disparity between the CE Cohort with an EHCP (18.8%) and the Suffolk population (3.9%).

⁷ *The Jay Review of Criminally Exploited Children*, Action for Children, 2024

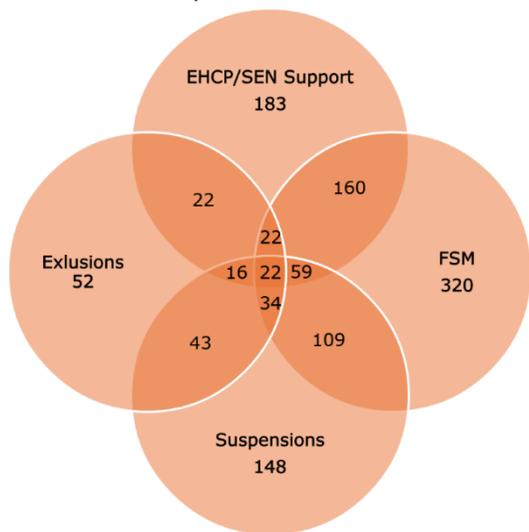
Trafficking and Exploitation of Children with Special Educational Needs & Disability, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth City Council & Manchester Metropolitan University, July 2024

Figure 11: Incidence of key indicators amongst CE Programme Cohort vs. total relevant pupil population (Sources: SCC CYP iHub; SODA CE Cohort Dataset)



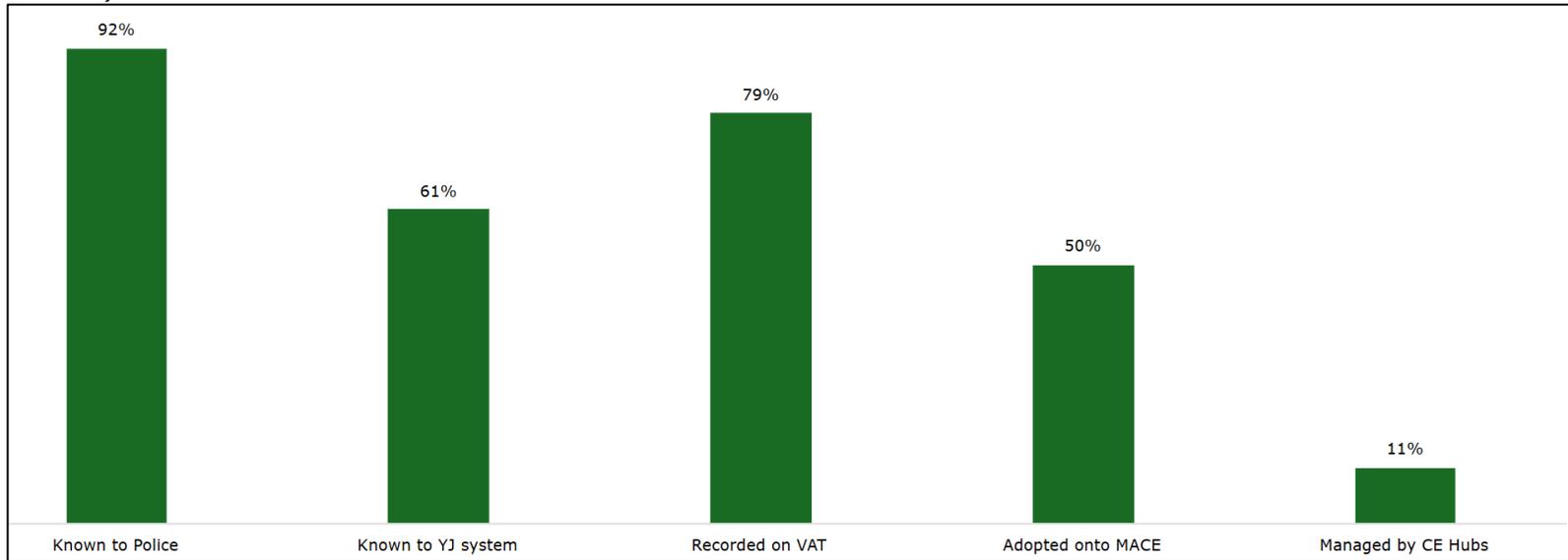
4.5. These risk factors frequently overlap, further increasing the risk of exploitation.

Figure 12: Overlap of risk factors for CE in the CE Programme Cohort, number of individuals (Source: SODA CE Cohort Dataset)



- 4.6. Of the Suffolk CE Programme Cohort, 92% are known to the police and 61% to the Youth Justice system. 50% were adopted to MACE at least once, with 11% managed by CE Hubs.

Figure 13: Proportion (% out of 554) of the CE Programme Cohort known to/dealt with by the System (Source: SODA CE Cohort Dataset)



- 4.7. Analysis of the 554 CE Programme Cohort shows that 365 CYP were discussed at MACE. However, of those, 160 were not adopted and 40 of the 75 CYP who were discussed more than once, were not adopted.
- 4.8. On 103 occasions, a CYP was discussed at MACE and found not to have any current evidence of exploitation and 70 out of the 365 CYP that were discussed only once at MACE were found not to have any current evidence of exploitation.
- 4.9. In some cases, a CYP adopted by MACE who had their case closed (after interventions with improvement being evidenced) was then re-adopted by MACE at a later date.

Figure 14: Examples of C/YP who have been discussed multiple times at MACE

Date of	Date Closed to	Outcome
11/11/2021	14/07/2022	Improvement evidenced, risk
15/05/2024	11/09/2024	No current evidence of exploitation
19/07/2021	19/07/2021	Not adopted
15/01/2025		OPEN
08/07/2021	11/04/2022	Improvement evidenced, risk
11/10/2023	15/11/2023	Improvement evidenced, risk
20/09/2021	20/09/2021	Not adopted
12/02/2025		OPEN
11/11/2021	10/02/2022	Improvement evidenced, risk
28/07/2022	27/10/2022	Improvement evidenced, risk
28/09/2023	28/09/2023	Not adopted
28/11/2024		OPEN
14/09/2022	15/03/2023	Improvement evidenced, risk
11/10/2023	11/10/2023	CLOSED
15/11/2023	15/11/2023	Not adopted
10/07/2024	10/07/2024	Not adopted
08/08/2022	05/09/2022	Left the county
15/11/2021	07/09/2022	Improvement evidenced, risk
17/07/2023	15/08/2023	Managed in another forum
10/10/2023	12/10/2023	Managed in another forum

- 4.10. There does appear to be some disparity between the referrals, the scoring on the VAT and the subsequent discussion at pre-MACE and MACE. This may be due to not all referrers having been trained on recognising CE, on different interpretations of the scoring questions on the VAT, or different views of CE. After the review of the VAT, SODA will further examine the correlation between those adopted by MACE, referrals and VAT scores.

5. Suffolk CE Programme 2024-2027 funding

Funding for the CE Programme 2024-2027 is provided by SPSL (£1,513,358 in total over the 3 years), by other partner and/or Suffolk System budgets and through in-kind contributions. There was a significant underspend in 2024/2025 due to understaffing in the CE Hubs and match funding from the Suffolk Serious Violence Duty budget.

FY 2024/25								
	Budget		Actual		SVD Funding	SPSL Claim		
CE Hub Staffing	£	427,770.00	£	326,638.18	£	159,766.00	£	166,872.00
CE Training Post	£	44,889.00	£	44,889.00	-	£	44,889.00	
CE Police Partner Post	£	52,333.00	£	52,333.00	-	£	52,333.00	
Totals	£	524,992.00	£	423,860.18	£	159,766.00	£	264,094.00