

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION:

New Powers to Hold Exploiters Accountable

Criminal Exploitation is **child abuse**.

Children **cannot consent** to their own exploitation.

Protecting children means **holding exploiters accountable**.

Current legislation | Operation Dynos learning | New Crime & Policing Act (2026)



CYCY

Leadership on Criminal Exploitation (CEC)

Driving national **awareness**, **policy development** and **practice change**



CEC Framework

Developed & Launched



National Training & Awareness

Delivered across Scotland



CEC Indicator Screening Tool

Created for Early Identification



SCRA & COPFS Practice Note

Ensuring protection and
reducing criminalisation



Support Integrated Approach to Exploitation, Contextual Safeguarding and ROTH



Practice Support

for Professionals & Teams
around families where
exploitation is a concern

Supporting Scotland's services to **better identify, understand & respond**
to **Criminal Exploitation of Children**



CYCJ Starting Point

CEC is child abuse

**Children cannot
consent to their
own exploitation**

Protection includes
accountability for
exploiters

- We use CEC deliberately, even where legislation uses CCE as the statutory term.
- The wording keeps the form of abuse in view and avoids placing “criminal” closest to the child.
- The task is to hold two truths: children may cause harm through aspects of their behaviour, and children may also be harmed through exploitation.



How the CEC Framework helps

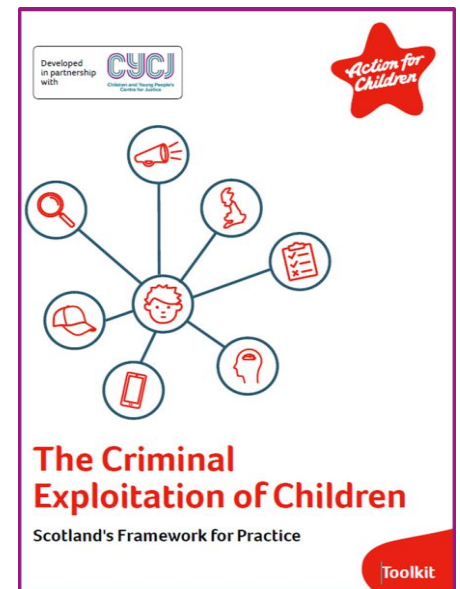
A shared way to recognise, evidence and respond

Gives a child protection lens for criminal exploitation.

Helps practitioners look beyond the incident and consider patterns, contexts and relationships.

Supports proportionate, structured professional judgement rather than waiting for certainty.

Encourages multi-agency evidence gathering, disruption and support for children and their family.





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POILEAS ALBA

DS Steph Bertram
Op Dynos
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I have over 16 years policing experience in various roles within response/community policing, CID and Public Protection Departments. In my current role within the Retail Crime Task Force, I lead a small yet very successful team “Operation Dynos” that specialises in Criminal Child Exploitation and youth offending.

The team and I work closely with some of the most vulnerable young people across the West of Scotland, implementing inclusive and effective responses to mitigate risk of harm whilst adopting a contextual safeguarding approach.

I am passionate about child protection and have a positive mindset and approach my role with a “can do” attitude by being a visible leader and ensuring I consider the welfare, views and opinions of my staff, the organisation, external partners, and the young persons.



OP DYNOS: BACKGROUND

- Operation Dynos was Police Scotland's response to a surge in organised, high value theft by shoplifting of alcohol for re-sale (and associated offences of disorder/violence), across the West of Scotland, largely carried out by care experienced, young people coerced into offending via Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE).
- A dedicated team, comprising of 1 x DS and 4 x PCs was created, utilising Retail Crime Taskforce funding, to proactively target the group and safeguard young persons identified as being at risk of exploitation.



AIMS & APPROACH:

The teams' primary objectives were to prevent young people from becoming entrenched in criminality, disrupt exploitation networks, and safeguard those at identified at risk. The following aims were set:

- Target high tariff individuals, priority hotspots and organised criminals
- Disrupt the demand/marketplace for resale of stolen goods
- Safeguard & support children & young people at risk of criminal exploitation
- Enable children & young people engrained in criminality to disengage via diversionary activities

To successfully meet the objectives, a dual strategy of engagement and investigation was adopted.



STRATEGY:

- Dedicated 'Single Point of Contact' engagement was to influence positive behaviour changes whilst understanding the young people's interests in order to support the identification of appropriate diversionary activities, and gain information, intelligence, and evidence in respect of the organised crime aspect of the group to progress the criminal investigation.
- Stage one of the investigation focussed on identifying the adults facilitating/directing the criminal network and exploiting the vulnerable youths involved.
- Stage two targeted the resale market for the stolen goods with a view to disrupting the overall functionality of the group.



GOOD PRACTICE:

- Key/joint engagement and with young people, Social Work, Children's Houses, family members and attendance at multi agency meetings, highlighting threat/risk/harm.
- Regular face to face meetings and interactions with young people and diversionary action plans being discussed and implemented effectively, reduced harmful behaviour and alcohol/drug misuse.
- Op Dynos documents detailing harmful behaviour, in depth knowledge of previous/pending cases, impact on community/policing, escalation of violence and recognition for good behaviour. Ensuring that all information shared with COPFS/Children's Reporter/Social Work re significant risks to themselves and communities.
- Sufficient, proportionate, and justifiable rationale to ensure the most serious and harmful behaviours are dealt with in police custody to enable images, fingerprints, DNA samples and to initiate court proceedings.



Op Dynos: The Challenges

10% Crimes

17 years old

Offending
6 Divisions

Child
Protection

33 Dynos
Associates

CCE
Victim vs
Perp

34%
Stolen Property
value

Rights of the
Child vs Others



Op Dynos: Engagement and Partnerships



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LEGISLATION

The primary legislation for human trafficking is the **Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015**.

There are two parts to the offence of trafficking as follows: the relevant action and an intention to exploit or the knowledge of likely exploitation. Both of these are needed for the S1 offence to be complete.

- A **relevant action** is any of the following –
- the recruitment of another person
- the transportation or transfer of another person
- the harbouring or receiving of another person,
- the exchange or transfer of control over another person
- the arrangement or facilitation of any of the actions mentioned in paragraphs



POTENTIAL INDICATORS OF CCE

- Persistently going missing from school or home and / or being found out-of area.
- Unexplained acquisition of money, clothes, or mobile phones.
- Excessive receipt of texts / phone calls and/or having multiple handsets.
- Relationships with older / controlling individuals or groups.
- Leaving home / care without explanation.
- Suspicion of physical assault / unexplained injuries.
- Parental concerns.
- Carrying weapons.
- Significant decline in school results / performance.
- Criminal association or isolation from peers or social networks.
- Self-harm or significant changes in emotional well-being.



OP DYNOS TIMELINE/RESULTS

- April 2025

Commencement of Dynos, allocated SPOC's, key youth engagement, increased identifications and detections in crimes across Scotland

- June 2025

Arrest and Remand of significant adult, responsible for upskilling youths, control/power – linked to drug abuse/sexual harm

- August 2025

Regroup and restructure by adult associations and some young persons – actively seeking buyers through social media platforms

- April 2025-Present

6 males and 1 female arrested and conditions in place to safeguard young persons. 6 Young persons placed into secure accommodation



Op Dynos

Man in court on 'youth exploitation' charge after shoplifting incident

Daily Record

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Man charged with 'exploiting vulnerable young people' in retail crime crackdown

A 22-year-old man was arrested in Hamilton in connection with organised crime and exploitation of young people through Operation Dynos.

Man charged for exploiting youths over £50,000 of alcohol thefts



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Vulnerable young people being recruited for shoplifting by organised crime gangs

A 52-year-old man had been arrested and charged with organised crime offences related to shoplifting.



Man arrested and charged under Operation Dynos

A man has been arrested and charged in connection with an ongoing operation to tackle retail offences linked to organised crime.



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INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION:

- Continuous engagement with young people after being placed in secure and when they turn 18
- Early interventions regarding drug/alcohol abuse, harmful behaviours and safeguarding concerns
- Key joint working with partner agencies to implement plans relating to hobbies/activities, further education, employment and urgent referrals relating to health concerns
- Listening and learning from the young people, valuing their views, opinions and ideas on how to impact others & future
- Implementing best practice document regarding Child Criminal Exploitation
- Multiple young people have now disengaged with criminality and enrolled in further education, employment and working with partner agencies

LEARN MORE TO IMPROVE SERVICES AND TRAINING



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Crime & Policing Act 2026

Part 4: criminal exploitation of children & others

New Child Criminal Exploitation offence

Child Criminal Exploitation Prevention Orders

Cuckooing and home takeover offence

Internal concealment offences

Links to special measures and proceeds of crime.



New CCE Offence

Section 48 of the Crime & Policing Act 2026

Applies to **adults** aged 18 or over.

Covers doing **something to, for, or in relation** to a child.

Focuses on **intent to cause** the child to engage in criminal activity.

The **child does not need to commit a crime**.

The **adult does not need to know** the person is **under 18**.

Maximum penalty: 10years, a fine , or both.



What adult behaviour may look like

Examples the offence may help name

Recruiting a child **into** an organised crime group.

Directing a child to **steal**, **transport** or **sell** items.

Coercing or **pressuring** a child through **debt**, **fear** or **loyalty**.

Using another person, including another **child**, to **involve** the **child**.

Creating opportunities for **future** criminal activity.



Prevention Orders

A civil route for disruption

- Civil orders against adults aged 18 over
- Available on application or after criminal proceedings whether convicted or acquitted
- Court uses the **balance of probabilities**
- Restrictions must be necessary to protect children- can prohibit or require a behaviour
- Interim orders can be used while an application is being considered
- In place for minimum 2years, unless an interim order
- Breach is a criminal offence



Cuckooing and place

Home takeover as part of exploitation

Specific offence of taking control of a dwelling for criminal activity.

Relevant where homes or addresses are used to store, move or sell items.

Consent is limited where there is coercion, deception, abuse or the person is under 18.

Maximum penalty: 5 years, a fine, or both



Internal concealment

Serious physical and psychological harm

Offences linked to causing concealment of specified items inside the body.

For children, proof of coercion is not required in the same way as for adults.

Relevant to drugs or other items carried for criminal purposes.

Recognises the power imbalance and risk to the child.



Special measures and proceeds of crime

Accountability includes protection and disruption of benefit

Victims are automatically eligible for special measures in relevant proceedings.

CEC and Cuckooing are linked to criminal lifestyle provisions.

This recognises exploitation as organised, relational and financially motivated.



What this means for practice

Preparing so we can use effectively in Scotland

Commencement in Scotland still needs confirmed by Scottish Ministers.

The Act **adds** to existing Scottish toolbox

It does **not replace** child protection, Initial Referral Discussions, referral to National Referral Mechanism, or the Lord Advocate's Instructions.

The **CEC Framework for Practice** helps us evidence patterns and keep the child protection lens clear.

Do **not wait** for a child to disclose.



A word cloud graphic on a dark blue background. The central text is "ANY QUESTIONS?" in large, bold, white capital letters. Surrounding this central text are various question words in different colors (white, yellow, green, blue) and sizes. The words include "WHEN?", "WHERE?", "WHO?", "WHAT?", "HOW?", "WHY?", and "What?". Some words are repeated, and their orientations vary, creating a dynamic and engaging visual effect.



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References and sources

Key sources for the legal and practice content

[Crime and Policing Act 2026](#)

[UK Government factsheet: child criminal exploitation, cuckooing and internal concealment](#)

[CYCJ Info Sheet 123: UK Government's Crime & Policing Act 2026 Part 4, 2026](#)

[Scotland's Framework for Practice: Criminal Exploitation of Children \(2025\) with CEC Screening tool and multi-agency self-assessment.](#)

[Referring a child to the Children's Reporter with concerns of criminal exploitation](#)
[CYCJ Contextual Safeguarding dedicated webpage](#)

[Human Trafficking and Exploitation \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#)

[Lord Advocate's Instructions on non-prosecution of victims of human trafficking and exploitation](#)

[CYCJ E-Learning with specific CEC module](#)

