Assessment of Independent Child Trafficking Guardians – Regional Practice Co-ordinators

Final report

Research Report 120

Authors: Hannah Shrimpton, Roya Kamvar, Jonathan Harper, Samuel Gordon-Ramsay, James Long and Stuart Prince

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Introduction

Section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 introduced the role of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTAs) to provide an independent source of advice and advocacy for trafficked children. ICTAs were introduced to three initial adopter sites in January 2017: Greater Manchester, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and nationally in Wales. Following the Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, ICTAs were renamed Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs) in July 2019.

Following interim findings from the evaluation of the ICTG service in July 2018, the Government announced a revision of the ICTG model. As part of the revised model, provision of the Service underwent a change of structure to reflect the differing needs of children who have existing support networks in the UK compared with children who do not. Children without a figure of parental responsibility for them in the UK continue to receive one-to-one support from ICTG Direct Workers,[1] while the ICTG Regional Practice Co-ordinators' (RPCs') role was introduced to focus on children who do have a figure of parental responsibility. The role of the RPCs is to encourage multi-agency support for children who have been identified as trafficked or potentially trafficked, by advocating for the child and ensuring that their 'best interests' are being considered in the decisions made by public authorities. The Government also expanded the Service to three later adopter sites: East Midlands, the London Borough of Croydon, and West Midlands Combined Authority.[2]

Research objectives and methodology

The Home Office and Ipsos MORI jointly conducted the assessment of the RPCs' role. Ipsos MORI was commissioned by the Home Office to conduct a qualitative assessment of the delivery and impact of the RPCs' role. Its aim is:

- to gain an in-depth understanding of how the RPCs' role has been working since its first introduction in October 2018; and

- the perceived impacts on both the professionals within relevant sectors and the children they support.

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[1] ICTG Direct Workers will be referred to simply as 'Direct Workers' throughout the report, while ICTG Regional Practice Co-ordinators will be referred to as 'RPCs'.

[2] These three sites are referred to as 'later adopter sites' throughout, while the initial three sites are referred to as 'initial adopter sites'. When all six sites are discussed together, they are referred to as 'early adopter sites'.

The Home Office was responsible for the quantitative element of the evaluation using data collected by Barnardo's (the ICTG service provider).

The assessment involved the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative research involved interviewing 36 stakeholders, including professionals working for the ICTG service, as well as operational and strategic staff working in social care, the criminal justice system and the Single Competent Authority (SCA), the UK's decision-making body of National Referral Mechanism (NRM)[3] considerations. The quantitative data complements the qualitative research by providing contextual information throughout the report. It is composed of three data sets:

- NRM data to compare NRM decisions in ICTG sites with the rest of the UK, as well as to estimate the number of children who fall under the RPCs' coverage;

- data collected by Barnardo's on the demographics and case length of children in the ICTG service; and

- data collected by Barnardo's on the amount of contact between RPCs and other professionals, as well as between ICTG Direct Workers and the children on their caseload.

Background and context

A total of 513 children were supported by the ICTG service between October 2018 (when the first RPC was established) and December 2019; one third of these children were supported by RPCs. This takes the total number of children supported by the Service since its inception in February 2017 to 901.[4]

Around three quarters of children supported by RPCs were referred primarily for child criminal exploitation (CCE),[5] with almost all the remaining children referred

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[3] The NRM is the system that identifies victims of modern slavery in the UK. The SCA receives NRM referrals and is responsible for making 'reasonable' and 'conclusive grounds' decisions on whether or not an individual is a victim of modern slavery.

[4] Barnardo's only collects management information on children who have been supported by RPCs through help and advice to front-line staff who are in direct contact with the child. This may include advising first responders on a child's NRM referral or advising professionals on the child's safeguarding or support options. Only children supported by RPCs in this way appear in RPC caseload data. The data does not include children who may have been non-specifically supported through the general advice and guidance that RPCs provide to front-line staff. The total number of children supported by the service is therefore referring only to children who appear on ICTG and RPC caseloads.

[5] For all proportion calculations in this report, relevant data recorded as 'unknown' has been excluded. As an example, for a small number of children referred to RPCs, their primary exploitation type was recorded as 'unknown'. They have therefore been excluded from the calculation of primary exploitation type. The exact number recorded as 'unknown' in this case cannot be specified for confidentiality reasons.

primarily for child sexual exploitation (CSE).[6] Stakeholders suggested that CCE affects all geographic areas, but especially urban areas with more gang activity.

Most children referred to RPC caseloads were UK nationals (90%), male (70%), and aged between 15 and 17 (76%), a pattern that was consistent across each site.

There was a strong association between males and CCE, and females and CSE. Almost all (98%) of the males supported by RPCs were referred for CCE, while most of the females (80%) were referred for CSE. However, no clear associations could be found between exploitation type and other demographic characteristics.

Stakeholders believed that circumstances that hinder stability in a young person's life, such as access to education and instability at home, could increase their vulnerability to exploitation. Stakeholders also noted the difficulty in supporting children who were exploited by their own families.

Delivery of the RPCs' role

The RPCs' role was not designed prescriptively, which has meant that while the role shared some core functions across regions, **there was flexibility within the role.** This allowed RPCs to adapt methods of delivery depending on the needs and organisational structure of the area.

The ICTG service reported that RPCs generally worked infrequently with Direct Workers but would regularly partner with ICTG Service Managers.[7] This ensured ICTG service coverage at multi-agency meetings and helped to identify gaps in services to victims of child exploitation across regions. RPCs created links between the ICTG service and across partner agencies by:

- attending both strategic and operational multi-agency panels;

- brokering conversations between agencies for individual children; and

- sometimes embedding within teams.

RPCs would raise awareness, train and upskill services within local authorities. Stakeholders mentioned the different ways they did this, including delivering formal awareness-raising sessions on:

- indicators of child exploitation;

- the NRM process; and

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[6] Many children referred to the ICTG service are the victim of multiple exploitation types. 'Primary exploitation type' refers to the main form of exploitation reportedly suffered by a child.

[7] ICTG Service Managers will be referred to simply as 'Service Managers' throughout the report.

- how to support children who had been trafficked or exploited.

These awareness-raising sessions were supplementary to the training that public authorities and first responder organisations ordinarily provide.

RPCs provided hands-on support to operational professionals for the children who they were working with. Stakeholders gave many examples of this including:

- co-ordinating a multi-agency response;

- confirming the presence of child trafficking indicators;

- advising on appropriate support packages to meet the needs of the child;

- supporting front-line staff throughout criminal proceedings; and

- reviewing or collecting information for NRM referrals.

The quantitative data reflects the observations made by stakeholders on the organisations that RPCs support. Front-line workers such as social workers (34%), Youth Offending Team members (14%) and the police (10%) accounted for the majority of contact that RPCs had with other professionals on behalf of the children they support.[8] The NRM (37%), safeguarding (23%) and social care (16%) were the three most common topics that RPCs discussed with others on behalf of the children they supported.

The skills and expertise of the RPCs, as well as any prior connections formed in previous roles, were important contributing factors to the RPCs' role working well. In particular, the ability to build relationships with different agencies and local authorities was seen as a key enabler to the RPC being successful in their role. The independence of RPCs also reportedly helped to build trust with agencies as RPCs were generally viewed as impartial. RPCs reported that the flexible nature of their role enabled them to tailor their offer to the needs of different local authorities.

The main challenges experienced by RPCs were generally based on external factors. Stakeholders reported that some teams within local authorities could be reluctant to engage with RPCs, for example, if there were concerns that the RPCs' role was to scrutinise or inspect teams. RPCs could also struggle to work with some police forces where there was a lack of understanding about the nature of CCE and the benefits of the NRM. Tight resourcing and high turnover within local authorities was also said to limit the ability of professionals to take-up RPC awareness-raising sessions and embed best practice.

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[8] 'Contact' is defined as an interaction between an RPC and another professional on behalf of a child, whether through in-person meetings, email, letters, or by phone (including calls, messages and video calls).

Outcomes of the RPCs' role

Direct Workers reported that the introduction of RPCs had increased their capacity, enabling them to spend more time with the children they worked with. This is reflected in the quantitative data. In the initial adopter sites the ratio of Direct Workers to the children they supported decreased following the introduction of the RPCs' role, while the number of meetings that Direct Workers had with children increased.

ICTG teams also felt that the RPCs' role had bolstered the reach of the ICTG service, strengthening the knowledge base of the Service and creating targeted partnerships with key agencies.

There was evidence that RPCs may have had a positive impact on professionals' awareness of indicators of child exploitation (particularly of CCE) and how best to support children; particularly on social care, youth offending and police teams. Feedback from stakeholders indicated that improvements in services' awareness, confidence and capacity to submit and navigate the NRM process were particularly noticeable. **However, some teams reported that RPCs had less impact on their awareness of child exploitation, as they already had high levels of expertise in this area before the RPCs came to their region**.

There was a general acknowledgement that awareness-raising about Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act was in an early stage. Section 45 provides a statutory defence for victims of modern slavery for certain criminal offences that they were compelled to carry out as a result of their exploitation. Reasons for slow progress were generally seen as external to RPC efforts. These included:

- a lower baseline level of awareness amongst professionals outside the ICTG service;

- the complexity of the legislation; and

- the sensitivities involved in trying to navigate the use of the defence at court and with the police.

The RPCs' role was felt to have had a clear positive impact on outcomes for children in several ways, with operational stakeholders drawing on specific examples from their caseloads. RPCs were seen as a safety net for children in the region, with many stakeholders feeling that RPCs had identified gaps in service provision for child victims of modern slavery on a strategic level, as well as on a case-by-case basis. Stakeholders felt more children were identified as needing support than previously, because professionals were either:

- more aware of the needs of exploited children due to RPCs raising awareness; or

- more aware following RPC advice regarding the individual children that professionals were working with.

The multi-agency links created by RPCs as well as their advocacy for the use of relevant legislation or disruption orders were seen as important in developing holistic support packages for children.

However, there were some concerns that certain children's needs could not be met by the ICTG service if RPCs are not able to work directly with children. It was felt that in circumstances where public services were unable to provide an appropriate key worker or where the exploitation was particularly hidden, children could benefit from RPCs having the opportunity to work directly with them.

The introduction of RPCs was felt by some stakeholders to have resulted in increased numbers of NRM referrals and a higher proportion of positive NRM decisions.[9] The latter is a view the quantitative data seems to support.[10] However, there was an acknowledgement that these positive shifts were due to a multitude of factors, including a national increase in awareness of CCE and CSE. It was noted that it could be difficult to disentangle the contributions of the RPCs' role from the contributions of different agencies, organisations and charities, as well as the ICTG service as a whole.

Conclusions and lessons learnt

Overall the assessment found that stakeholders were very positive about the RPCs' role, particularly in raising awareness about indicators of exploitation and increasing the confidence of stakeholders to submit good quality NRM referrals. Positive outcomes for children as perceived by stakeholders were also seen. The assessment highlighted the following important considerations for rolling out the RPCs' role nationally.

- **The skills and expertise of RPCs were pivotal to the success of the role**. Stakeholders felt that their ability to build relationships with different agencies and local authorities was particularly important. Relationship-building skills should be considered as part of the recruitment of RPCs.

- **The RPCs' role added strategic planning capacity to the ICTG service**. However, the assessment highlighted that RPCs sometimes struggled to find the right balance between the strategic and operational components of their role, meaning that supporting operational staff was often prioritised. This suggests resourcing of each area should be considered, particularly once the ICTG service is embedded and well-known in a region.

- **Discretionary direct short-term intensive direct support from an RPC could be of benefit for some children**. Some RPCs felt that having the flexibility to work with some children would have improved outcomes for those children. However,

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[9] The increase in referrals could not be verified by the quantitative data, as NRM referrals have generally increased month-on-month in both ICTG sites and areas outside ICTG sites.

[10] There was a general increase in the proportion of positive reasonable grounds decisions in ICTG sites compared with areas outside ICTG sites after the implementation of RPCs.

this view should be weighed up against the need to deliver the vital strategic component of the RPCs' role.

- **Awareness-raising by RPCs of the Section 45 defence could be improved**. Despite RPCs' efforts to raise awareness amongst Crown Prosecution Service teams and courts, stakeholders felt that progress had been slow compared to the RPCs' ability to raise awareness in other areas. While many of the reasons given were considered external to RPCs' efforts, stakeholders considered improved awareness-raising of the Section 45 defence an important next step in training and awareness plans.

- **The reach and impact of RPCs could be increased**. Front-line staff highlighted that heavy workloads had often prevented take-up of RPC support. There were examples of RPCs developing training material such as handout training tools, more of which could be developed to help to mitigate the impact of tight resourcing or high staff turnover. Such workarounds could help to enhance the impact of RPCs' work.

- **More co-ordinated communication could improve understanding of the RPCs' role.** When RPCs were introduced in initial early adopter sites, some stakeholders felt that there had been a lack of communication about the change in model and the reasons behind it. As the ICTG service is rolled out nationally, more co-ordinated communication across relevant services could help to improve awareness and implementation of the Service.

- **Mapping out regional needs helps RPCs to tailor their support to local need**. Regions have varying levels of awareness of exploitation, as well as varying services in place to support victims. By investing time to identify where and how the RPCs' role would benefit each local authority in their region, RPCs can better adapt the level and type of support to the needs of the local authority.

- **Adapting the model to local contexts could improve coverage of the ICTG service**. It may be useful to consider placing more than one RPC in areas of greater need. Such adaptations of the RPCs' role to local contexts may improve coverage of the Service and help RPCs to balance their work.

1. Introduction

The Home Office and Ipsos MORI jointly conducted the assessment of the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian service (ICTG) Regional Practice Co-ordinators' (RPCs') role. Ipsos MORI was commissioned by the Home Office to conduct a qualitative assessment of the delivery and impact of the RPCs' role since its first introduction in October 2018. The Home Office was responsible for the quantitative element of the evaluation using data collected by Barnardo's. This initial chapter provides background context to the ICTG service model, a description of the RPCs' role, as well as the aims and objectives of this assessment.

1.1 Policy context

The Modern Slavery Act, introduced in England and Wales in 2015, provides the policy framework and dedicated legislation for dealing with modern slavery. Section 48 recognises a requirement for the provision of services that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of child victims of modern slavery. Section 48 introduced the role of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTAs) to provide an independent source of advice and advocacy for trafficked children. Following the Independent Review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, ICTAs were renamed ICTGs in July 2019 and will be referred to as such throughout this report. The ICTG service is currently delivered by Barnardo's, financed by a grant from the Home Office. The Government's work on ICTGs continues to be informed by both recommendations from the Independent Review and learning from the evaluations of the early adopter sites.

1.2 The Independent Child Trafficking Guardians service and Regional Practice Co-ordinators' role

ICTGs were introduced to three initial adopter sites in January 2017: Greater Manchester, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and nationally in Wales. Based on interim findings of an evaluation of the ICTG service running in the three initial adopter sites during 2017 and 2018, published in July 2018 by University of Bedfordshire and the Home Office,[11] the Government announced that it would revise the ICTG model. The Government also expanded the service to three later adopter sites: West Midlands Combined Authority in October 2018, followed in January 2019 by the East Midlands and in April 2019 by the

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[11] **University of Bedfordshire/Home Office** (2018) *An assessment of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates: Interim findings* (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730098/assessment-of-independent-child-trafficking-advocates-horr101.pdf)

London Borough of Croydon.[12] The final evaluation of ICTGs in the three initial adopter sites conducted across a two-year period from 2017 to 2019 was published in July 2019[13] and supported the interim findings.

As part of the revised model, provision of the ICTG service underwent a change of structure in response to a key finding from the 2019 evaluation of the Service. This was that child victims of UK nationality have different needs to victims of non-UK nationality.[14] In particular, the qualitative findings from the evaluation suggested that UK children were more likely to have existing support networks on referral, which comprised family, friends, community and professionals. In contrast, the networks of non-UK children were often less developed, which meant that ICTG Direct Workers[15] could have a more active role. Therefore, the revised service model continues to provide one-to-one support for children without a figure of parental responsibility for them in the UK with an appointed Direct Worker. It also introduced RPCs, whose role is to encourage a multi-agency approach to support children with a figure of parental responsibility for them in the UK.[16]

The RPCs' role is designed to advocate for and ensure that the 'best interests' of a trafficked child are being considered in the decisions made by public authorities. This is achieved through a number of related functions, including:

- bolstering multi-agency working in relation to trafficked children and fostering connections between services;

- offering consultation and support to front-line workers to complete National Referral Mechanism (NRM)[17] referrals where appropriate; and

- offering independent advice and consultation to other professionals working with the child, including social workers, youth offending officers, and police forces.

Another key component of the role is to embed best practice in the local area by:

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[12] These three sites are referred to as 'later adopter sites' throughout, while the initial three sites are referred to as 'initial adopter sites'. When all six sites are discussed together, they are referred to as 'early adopter sites'.

[13] **University of Bedfordshire/Home Office** (2019) *An evaluation of Independent Child Trafficking Guardians – early adopter sites: Final report* (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819723/evaluation-independent-child-trafficking-guardians-final-horr111.pdf)

[14] The initial three early adopter sites: Greater Manchester, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and Wales transitioned children into the revised model over time, allowing a lead-in period for the safe transition of children to the revised model.

[15] ICTG Direct Workers will be referred to simply as 'Direct Workers' throughout the report.

[16] As such, when referring to children supported by RPCs, these are children with a figure of parental responsibility for them in the UK, who are generally UK nationals.

[17] The NRM is the system that identifies victims of modern slavery in the UK.

- strategically identifying and addressing potential gaps in services; and

- delivering awareness-raising on child trafficking indicators and modern slavery, including the use of the statutory defence provided for in Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.[18]

1.3 Research objectives

This assessment builds on the evaluation of the ICTG service undertaken by the University of Bedfordshire and the Home Office, published in July 2019. Its aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of how the RPCs' role has been working since its introduction in October 2018, and its perceived impacts against intended outcomes.

Quantitative data is used to add further context to the qualitative findings, providing statistical information to complement the views and experiences of those interviewed.

The core objectives of this qualitative assessment are as follows.

- To understand how the RPCs' role is delivered in the six early adopter sites (Greater Manchester, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, Wales, East Midlands, West Midlands and Croydon).

- To explore what impacts the role has had on professionals within relevant sectors, who have had practical experience of working with an RPC in the last six months of operating the new model, and, through these professionals, the impact that the RPC role has had on children in the ICTG service.

- To explore what impacts the RPC role has had on work across the wider ICTG service.

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[18] Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides a statutory defence for victims of trafficking and slavery who are accused of committing a criminal act. The Section 45 defence can be used when a child commits an offence as a direct consequence of being or having been a victim of slavery or trafficking.

2. Methodology

The assessment of the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' (RPCs') role comprises a qualitative and quantitative element. The qualitative approach was led by researchers at Ipsos MORI and involved 36 telephone interviews with stakeholders and Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service staff across the six early adopter sites between 18 November and 2 February 2020. Direct Workers, Service Managers[19] and RPCs were interviewed (Table 1), as well as a range of criminal justice and social care stakeholders whose role involved interaction with the RPCs (Table 2). The qualitative strand of the assessment aimed to gather experiences and perceived impacts of the RPCs' role, and any key examples of best practice in the respective adopter sites.

The quantitative element of this research was led by Home Office researchers and involved the analysis of National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referral data and data collected by Barnardo's detailing the characteristics of children on the RPC and Direct Worker caseloads, as well as the levels of contact RPCs have had with professionals and that Direct Workers have had with children in the ICTG service.

2.1 Qualitative strand

A purposive sampling approach was adopted,[20] within which participants must have had:

- experience of working with RPCs and children who had been trafficked or exploited as part of their professional role; or

- oversight or practical experience of working with an RPC within the last six months of operating the new model.

Stakeholders were selected from a list provided by the ICTG service to cover each area of the ICTGs' work, including social care, criminal justice and the Single Competent Authority (SCA).

There were three key sampling criteria used to ensure a spread of stakeholders who work with RPCs:

- early adopter site;
- professional background; and
- type of role (operational or strategic).

All six RPCs were interviewed to explore their experiences and to explore similarities and differences across the sites. All five Service Managers[21] were interviewed, as well as the

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[19] ICTG Service Managers will be referred to simply as 'Service Managers' throughout the report.

[20] **Rosaline S. Barbour, British Medical Journal (2001),** *Checklists for improving rigour in qualitative research: a case of the tail wagging the dog?,* (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1120242/)

[21] There is a dual Service Manager for Wales and Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. In Croydon, the RPC also serves as Service Manager for the borough.

Direct Workers working in the three initial adopter sites. The aim was to understand how the RPCs' role has worked with and impacted on the wider ICTG service. In addition, 10 criminal justice stakeholders (including those working in youth offending and police teams) and 11 social care stakeholders were interviewed, as well as 1 NRM SCA stakeholder.

There were difficulties encountered in interviewing some stakeholders. Strategic stakeholders were hard to reach, partly due to the limited number of strategic stakeholders received as part of the sample frame, but also due to lower response rates. This is thought to reflect:

- their low levels of interaction with the RPCs;
- the assessment coming quite early in the work and embedment of the RPCs' role; and
- busy diaries.

There were a very low number of stakeholders received as part of the sample frame in Croydon. As such, only two interviews were achieved (both members of the ICTG service based in the borough). This was felt to reflect the later roll-out in the borough (the ICTG service was introduced in April 2019), as well as the challenges faced by the ICTG service in creating links with relevant stakeholders within the timescales of the assessment. The findings for this area are therefore presented cautiously and within this context.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (following consent from all participants). Analysis was conducted throughout the study from the outset of the fieldwork period. Data, consisting of interview transcripts, detailed interview field notes, and outputs from team discussions, was reviewed to create a thematic framework based around the different aspects and outcomes of the RPCs' role. Analysis primarily took place in Excel: field notes and anonymised transcripts were coded, reviewed and manually inputted into the thematic framework by researchers. When considering the qualitative data in the report, it is important to bear in mind the data's descriptive and illustrative nature. These findings are based on the perceptions of the stakeholders spoken to and often relate to personal experience of working within their field and region.

Groups	Locations
Direct workers	Hampshire and the Isle of Wight x1 Greater Manchester x1 Wales x1 Croydon x1
RPCs	Hampshire and the Isle of Wight x1 Greater Manchester x1 Wales x1 East Midlands x1 West Midlands x1 Croydon (dual RPC and Service Manager) x1
Service Managers	Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and Wales x1 Greater Manchester x1 East Midlands x1 West Midlands x1 Croydon x1

Table 1: Achieved qualitative sample – ICTG service

Location	Criminal justice	Social care
East Midlands	x1 Strategic x1 Operational	x1 Strategic x1 Operational
West Midlands	x2 Operational	x2 Operational
Croydon	-	-
Greater Manchester	x1 Strategic x1 Operational	x1 Strategic x1 Operational
Hampshire and the Isle of Wight	x1 Operational	x2 Strategic x1 Operational
Wales	x2 Strategic x1 Operational	x1 Strategic x1 Operational

Table 2: Achieved qualitative sample – Professionals

2.2 Quantitative strand

The quantitative research used within this report was led by Home Office researchers in the Modern Slavery Research and Analysis Team, and involved the analysis of three sets of data.

- NRM data was used to compare NRM decisions in ICTG sites with the rest of the UK, as well as to estimate the number of children who fall under RPCs' coverage.

- Data collected by Barnardo's detailing the characteristics and status of children on both RPC and Direct Worker caseloads. This includes demographic data, as well as the primary type of exploitation that the child has been referred for. It also details the number of children who fall under both the RPC and Direct Worker caseloads. This data covers the timeframe of October 2018[22] to December 2019.

- Data collected by Barnardo's detailing the contact that RPCs had with professionals, and the contact that Direct Workers had with children in the ICTG service. This data gives information about the type of contact that RPCs and Direct Workers had, the subject of this contact, and the type of professional this was with.[23] This data covers the timeframe of April 2019 to December 2019.[24]

All three datasets were used to produce descriptive statistics within the report, which complement the qualitative findings.

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[22] October 2018 was when the first RPC role was introduced, in the West Midlands.

[23] 'Contact' is defined as an interaction between an RPC and another professional on behalf of a child, whether through in-person meetings, email, letters, or by phone (including calls, messages and video calls).

[24] In order to ensure the safe transition of children from Direct Worker caseloads to RPC caseloads, transitions occurred over time rather than at a definitive point for each child. This means that 'contact' data prior to April 2019 (while transitions were still taking place) is less reliable, hence this data begins in April. Referral and closure data is not affected by the transitionary period and so can be relied upon prior to April 2019.

3. Background and local context

The following section incorporates qualitative and quantitative data. The quantitative data looks at the total number of children supported by Regional Practice Co-ordinators (RPCs),[25] as well as demographic information for these children and the type of exploitation that they had reportedly suffered. The quantitative data is complemented by stakeholder perceptions of trends in child trafficking across the six sites.

3.1 Number of children in the Service

Between January 2017 (when the initial adopter sites were established) and December 2019, there were 901 children supported by the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service. Around 513 of the children supported were referred in the period since the first RPC was established in October 2018, up until December 2019. Around two thirds (320) of these children were supported by Direct Workers, while around one third (193) were supported by RPCs.[26]

Within this same time frame, an estimated 1,300 potential child victims of modern slavery who had a figure of parental responsibility for them in the UK were identified within the early adopter sites and therefore fell under the coverage of an RPC.[27] For a child to be included on an RPC's caseload, the RPC must have worked with a professional or professionals on behalf of a specific child. This work may include advising first responders on a child's NRM referral or advising professionals on the child's safeguarding or support options. This means that RPCs worked with professionals to support 15% (193 out of 1,300) of the children under their coverage, although RPCs are likely to have had a much wider indirect influence, through the general advice and guidance that they provided to front-line staff.

Figure 1 displays the number of children on RPC caseloads between October 2018 and December 2019. It shows that the number of monthly referrals to RPCs increased between January and March 2019, and then stayed fairly level until October 2019, where it decreased. Alongside this, the number of children supported by RPCs steadily increased

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[25] When 'children supported by RPCs' are mentioned, this is referring to children who are specifically on an RPC's caseload. These children are a distinct group within the children who fall under an RPC's coverage.

[26] Barnardo's only collects management information on children who have been specifically supported by RPCs through help and advice to the front-line staff who are in direct contact with the child. This may include advising first responders on a child's National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referral, or advising professionals on the child's safeguarding or support options. Only children supported by RPCs in this way appear in RPC caseload data. The data does not include children who may have been supported through the general advice, guidance and strategic developments that the RPCs provide to front-line staff. The total number of children supported by the service is therefore referring only to children who appear on ICTG and RPC caseloads.

[27] This estimate was calculated by subtracting the number of children supported by Direct Workers (and who are therefore likely not to have a figure of parental responsibility in the UK) from the total number of children referred to the NRM between October 2018 and December 2019.

from January 2019 to October 2019, where the number then began to decrease at a similar rate. Anecdotal evidence from Barnardo's suggests that the decrease may partly be due to seasonal trends, as well as RPCs adopting a more strategic approach to their role over time. As RPCs have a finite capacity to support individual children, focus was shifted towards embedding knowledge and best practice on a more strategic level, rather than supporting individual cases. This was supported by the ICTG service, given the high number of children identified and the growing need for awareness of child trafficking within regions.
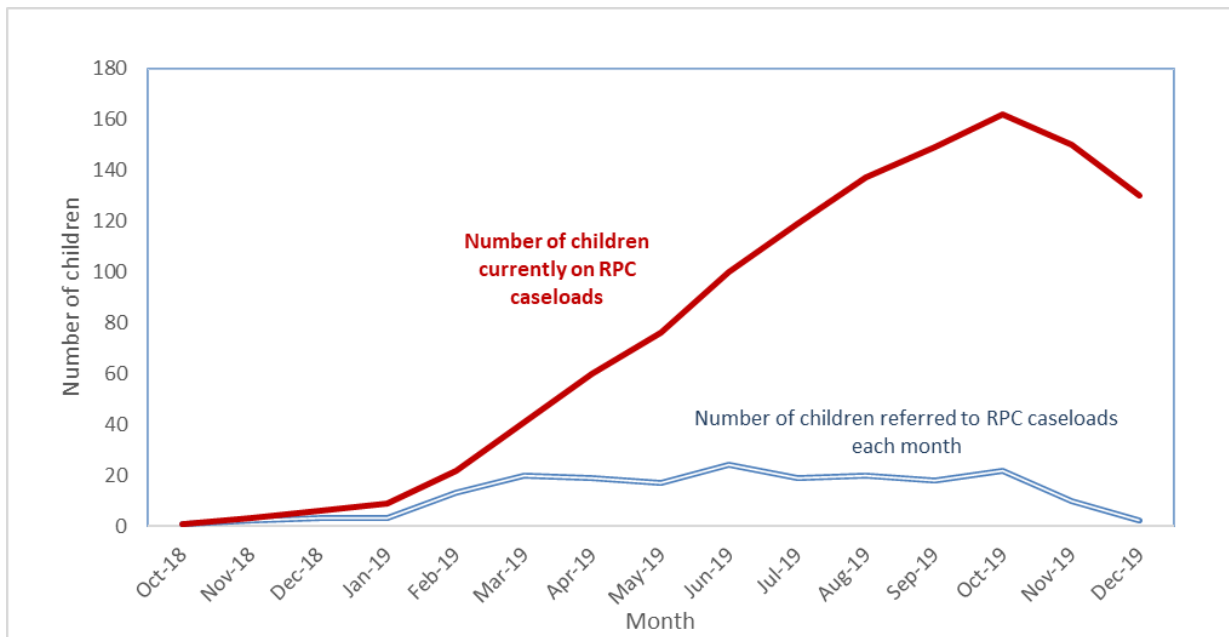
Figure 1: Total children on RPC caseloads,[28] and number of referrals to RPC caseloads, October 2018 to December 2019

3.2 Trends in child exploitation

3.2.1 Trends in exploitation type

Between October 2018 and December 2019[29] around three quarters (75%) of the children on RPC caseloads were primarily exploited[30] through child criminal exploitation (CCE), while almost all the remainder (24%) were primarily exploited through child sexual exploitation (CSE). [31] This contrasts with children supported by Direct Workers, where the

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[28] As mentioned in footnote 23, only children that RPCs have specifically supported through help and advice to front-line staff who are in direct contact with the child are reflected in RPC caseload data. Therefore, this chart doesn't include children that may have been non-specifically supported by RPCs through the general advice and guidance RPCs provide to professionals. 'Total number of children on RPC caseloads' include any children on RPC caseloads whose case has not yet closed.

[29] All demographic and exploitation type quantitative data falls within this time frame.

[30] Many children referred to the ICTG service are victims of multiple exploitation types. 'Primary exploitation type' refers to the main form of exploitation that a child has reportedly suffered.

[31] For all proportion calculations in this report, relevant data recorded as 'unknown' has been excluded. As an example, for a small number of children referred to RPCs, their primary exploitation type was recorded

most common primary exploitation type was labour exploitation (47%) followed by CCE (35%), and CSE (11%).[32]

While the quantitative data does not record types of CCE, stakeholders reported CCE as ranging from 'County Lines',[33] burglary, car theft and small-scale robbery (from sheds) to pickpocketing or shoplifting. The qualitative interviews suggest that CCE was experienced across all areas but there was some prominence in urban areas where gangs and criminality within communities was prevalent. County Lines was mentioned as a UK-wide issue, although stakeholders felt that there were also increased trends of drug running on small geographical scales, such as between streets, boroughs and towns.

3.2.2 Demographics and associations to exploitation type

Most children on RPC caseloads were UK nationals (90%), male (71%), and aged between 15 and 17 (76%)[34]. The proportion of males ranged from 83% in Greater Manchester to 54% in Wales,[35] while the proportions for age and nationality were similar in each early adopter site. The range in the proportion of males and females across sites associates strongly with exploitation type, with Greater Manchester having the largest proportion of children primarily exploited for CCE (88%) and Wales the largest proportion of children primarily exploited for CSE (43%).[36]

During the same timeframe, children supported by Direct Workers had relatively similar characteristics to children referred to RPCs. They were predominantly aged between 15 and 17[37] (78%) and male (76%), although a much smaller proportion of children supported by Direct Workers had a UK nationality (12%). The most common nationalities of children

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as 'unknown'. They have therefore been excluded from the calculation of primary exploitation type. The exact number recorded as 'unknown' in this case cannot be specified for confidentiality reasons.

[32] The last category, 'domestic servitude', accounted for the remaining 7% of children. For 62 children referred to Direct Workers, their primary exploitation type was recorded as 'unknown'.

[33] 'County Lines' is defined in the HM Government's _Serious Violence Strategy, April 2018_ as gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas [within the UK], using dedicated mobile phone lines or other forms of 'deal line'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move (and store) the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons. See: (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/698009/serious-violence-strategy.pdf)

[34] Eighteen people referred to RPC caseloads were 18 years old.

[35] Hampshire and the Isle of Wight has been excluded from these site comparisons due to small numbers. There were no children on RPC caseloads in Croydon as the Croydon RPC came online at a later starting point than the other sites. There is always an embedding process when launching an ICTG service in a new area, and so for the data period, the Croydon RPC focused on the strategic element of their role to raise the profile of the ICTG service rather than pick up an operational caseload.

[36] For a small number of children in Greater Manchester and Wales that were referred to RPCs, their primary exploitation type was recorded as 'unknown'. The exact number recorded as 'unknown' cannot be specified for confidentiality reasons.

[37] A small number of children referred to Direct Worker caseloads were 18 years old.

supported by Direct Workers were Vietnamese (18%), Sudanese (13%), UK nationals (12%) and Albanian (9%).[38]

The proportion of males and females varied from one site to another among children supported by Direct Workers, in a similar pattern to the children on RPC caseloads. While each site was predominantly male for children on Direct Worker caseloads, this ranged from 95% in Croydon to 59% in the East Midlands.

There was also a lot more variation in the nationalities of children supported by Direct Workers compared with children on RPC caseloads. Direct Workers in the East and West Midlands predominantly supported Vietnamese children. However, the most common nationality of child supported by Direct Workers in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight was Sudanese (62%), while in Croydon it was Albanian (50%), Wales it was UK children (38%), and Greater Manchester it was both UK children and Gambian children (19%). Labour exploitation was the most common form of exploitation in all sites except Croydon and Greater Manchester, where CCE was more common.

Stakeholders reported that there was some degree of association between certain types of exploitation and different demographics. The quantitative data shows that there was a strong association between primary exploitation type and gender for children referred to RPCs. Almost all males (98%) were referred to RPCs primarily for CCE. While the association between gender and exploitation type for females was slightly more mixed, it was still strong, with 80% of females referred primarily for CSE and 20% for CCE.[39] However, stakeholders across the board were keen to emphasise that both CSE and CCE occur across genders and that there is a tendency among services to align CCE with young males and CSE with females. Stakeholders also shared concerns that there was an under-reporting of CSE amongst male children.

However, for children supported by Direct Workers, the strength of the relationship between gender and exploitation type was less prominent than with children supported by RPCs. Males were most commonly referred for labour exploitation (52%), followed by CCE (42%). Similar to children supported by RPCs, females supported by Direct Workers were primarily exploited through CSE (45%), although a high proportion (25%) were also exploited through labour exploitation.[40]

For other demographic characteristics of children referred to both RPCs and Direct Workers, there was no noticeable association with primary exploitation type.

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[38] For a small number of children referred to Direct Workers, their nationality was recorded as 'unknown'. The exact number recorded as 'unknown' cannot be specified for confidentiality reasons.

[39] For a small number of both males and females referred to RPCs, their primary exploitation type was recorded as 'unknown'. The exact number recorded as 'unknown' cannot be specified for confidentiality reasons.

[40] For 40 males and 22 females referred to Direct Workers, their primary exploitation type was recorded as 'unknown'.

3.2.3 Risk factors

Stakeholders reported the factors that could make children vulnerable to exploitation spanned nationalities. However, there was a recognition that some factors could be more applicable to UK versus non-UK nationals. For example, children of non-UK nationality could be trafficked into the UK, which made it harder for UK-based services to identify their exploitation.

Across all nationalities of children, stakeholders believed the **circumstances that hinder stability in a young person's life could increase their vulnerability to exploitation**. This was recognised by front-line staff within and outside of the ICTG service, as well as by stakeholders in more strategic positions. Access to education was key, with stakeholders noting that children who were out of education, had low attendance at school or were not in mainstream education could be more vulnerable. Stakeholders reported that this could make children more exposed to potential exploiters and made it harder for services to track the children's whereabouts or provide an appropriate support structure. Instability at home was also seen as an important factor. Children could experience instability if they did not feel they had a safe home environment, which made it difficult for services to include family in any front-line interventions.

In some cases, stakeholders noted the vulnerability of children with learning disabilities and/or mental health issues, or those with previous experience of trauma.

Stakeholders also highlighted examples where **children were being exploited by their own families or local communities**. Family ties made it difficult to pull the child away from harmful situations especially where trust was fostered between those children and their exploiters. Stakeholders reported that this could be the case with British children, particularly in relation to generational criminal activity or gang ties, which pose a risk factor for some young people. This was particularly noted by stakeholders in social care, youth work, those working with local authorities and those within the ICTG service who have a knowledge of issues in their local area. This was seen to be the case particularly in urban areas where gang activity was more prevalent, or where gang dispersal programmes had localised criminal activity in surrounding areas and passed on gang ties to children. It was also noted that once exploited for criminal activity, especially through gangs, young people might have outstanding 'debts', which is part of a model that exploiters use to keep them under the control of gangs.

3.2.4 Geographical factors

Stakeholders reported that geographical factors could form the basis for the type of trafficking and exploitation that developed in an area. **Borders** were a key example of this. For example, ports seeing children being trafficked from outside of the UK (Portsmouth and Southampton), or borders between smaller towns and larger cities (North Wales linking into Cheshire and Merseyside; Greater Manchester and City of Manchester; Birmingham and surrounding towns) provide the setting for the type of trafficking prevalent in that area.

Stakeholders reported that County Lines was seen to affect an area in different ways, depending on whether it was defined as an 'exporter' or 'importer' area. In urban 'exporter' cities such as London, Portsmouth, Manchester and Cardiff, children were seen to move in and out of the region, but stakeholders reported that it was also common to see children being moved locally within boroughs or across streets. In the cities or towns that were receiving points, children from all over the UK could be found within them. As the impact on an area is exacerbated by networks of easily accessible outer regions or smaller towns, the East and West Midlands and Greater Manchester were seen to be particularly impacted by County Lines, as well as areas such as Portsmouth and North Wales. Stakeholders report that children who live along these lines were also at risk of missing out on services due to cross-border communication and commissioning challenges, as they are likely to be exploited in areas away from where they live.

3.3 Regional context and differences in service delivery

Stakeholders mentioned some key contextual issues and differences in local delivery across the early adopter sites, which were relevant to the implementation and delivery of the RPCs' role.

Stakeholders across all regions and agencies noted a **better familiarity across the board in their areas with CSE compared with CCE.** Stakeholders felt that awareness and capacity for response for CSE was generally more established. Many stakeholders reported misperceptions about CCE within certain agencies – especially police teams – where children were still being viewed as choosing to engage in criminal activity. In regions with more established exploitation services, stakeholders felt there were more instances of interlinked CCE and CSE provisions and a continual progress towards taking a holistic safeguarding approach.

Stakeholders also mentioned a **disparity between urban and rural areas** across the regions, with urban areas generally benefitting from more established services and availability of resources. Larger urban cities (such as Cardiff, Birmingham, City of Manchester and Portsmouth) often already had funding streams or specialised teams set up to focus on child trafficking prior to the ICTG service.

Rural deprivations were cited to be a core issue in some areas. For example, infrastructural deprivations such as access to healthcare and lack of services and broadband were fundamental barriers to the development of services or outreach of services generally in rural areas.

Greater Manchester was seen by stakeholders as an area with highly developed and interlinked services for responding to child trafficking and exploitation. This is mainly due to a network of Complex Safeguarding Teams (CSTs) set up within each of the ten local authorities in the region, which act as a combined local authority. These teams comprise social workers and other specialists within police teams, and have varied levels of support from multidisciplinary agencies depending on the team. They are responsible for cases that involve child exploitation (criminal and/or sexual exploitation) and are used primarily to manage CSE cases, but have also gained expertise and cases in CCE. The teams draw on local resources and regularly share information and create training initiatives – all of which can be disseminated across all the CSTs.

4. Delivery of the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' role

This chapter reports on how the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' (RPCs') role has been working across and within the early adopter sites and discusses the success factors and challenges that were found to impact on the delivery of the role. It is structured around some of the key aims of the role:

- supporting the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service;

- fostering collaborative working among partner agencies;

- awareness-raising and upskilling;

- identifying service gaps; and

- providing in-depth advice and consultation to front-line professionals.

4.1 How the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' role has worked

The RPCs' role was not designed prescriptively, which meant that while the role shared some core functions across regions, RPCs were able to adapt methods of delivery depending on the needs of the area. The governance structure of each region, including the type and nature of services already in place to support children who had been trafficked, also had a bearing on how the role was implemented. Although specifics could vary, the RPCs' role generally involved the following functions – sometimes in sequential stages:

- delivering an introduction of the ICTG service to local authorities;

- local area mapping to identify need and opportunities;

- awareness-raising of the role to relevant services (where needed);

- offering awareness-raising sessions to local services;

- establishing multi-agency links and integrating with other service offers; and

- being a contact for case-by-case support and advice where needed.

In later adopter sites where the ICTG service did not already have an established presence, the elements were sometimes implemented in stages and revisited on a regular basis, particularly for larger geographical areas. An introduction to the ICTG service as a whole was seen as needed for some local authorities as a baseline before links could be formed with relevant agencies. In regions or local authorities with already-established child trafficking services, RPCs were seen to embed within agencies and input into local system change plans.

Ultimately, each key aspect of the RPCs' role was interlinked. Establishing their presence in local areas and building relationships with local services created opportunities for RPCs to deliver awareness-raising sessions and case-by-case support to professionals. In addition, cross-regional links were seen as an important method of identifying and plugging gaps within services.

Table 3 shows the main reasons that RPCs had contact with other professionals in order to support children on their caseloads.[41] National Referral Mechanism (NRM) support was the most common reason for meetings, which may involve the RPC helping professionals to gain a better understanding of the NRM process,[42] as well as supporting them in gathering information and following up on referrals. Safeguarding was the second most common reason for contact given, which involved discussing a child's immediate safeguarding concerns. The third most common reason was social care, where RPCs would support the work of a child's social worker in areas such as safety planning, preparing paperwork for court, and looking through relevant legislation.[43] These three reasons combined accounted for just over two-thirds of the contact that RPCs had with other professionals on behalf of children.

Reason for contact between RPCs and professionals	Proportion of total contact
NRM support	37%
Safeguarding	23%
Social care	16%
Criminal justice	8%
Child safety	7%

Table 3: The top five reasons RPCs had contact with other professionals, by proportion of total contact[44]

4.1.1 ICTG service working

Working with Direct Workers

Overall, stakeholders reported that **RPCs rarely collaborated with Direct Workers on caseloads.**[45] Where this did happen, the role of the RPC would primarily be within the

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[41] As mentioned in footnote 23, 'contact' is defined as an interaction between an RPC and another professional on behalf of a child, whether through in-person meetings, email, letters, or by phone (including calls, messages and video calls).

[42] Supplementary to training provided to professionals by their own organisations.

[43] Topics such as safety planning and preparing paperwork for court fall under 'social care' when an RPC is supporting a social worker in this work. When an RPC is doing the work directly, these topics may fall under different categories.

[44] In 424 instances, the reason given for contact was unspecified. These instances have been excluded from proportion calculations.

[45] The frequency of meetings between RPCs and Direct Workers could not be determined in the quantitative data, as meetings between RPCs and other members of the ICTG service (including Direct Workers, Service managers and other RPCs) were all grouped under the same category.

referral phase (identifying children who the Direct Worker might support). RPCs also occasionally offered ad hoc advice and consultation to Direct Workers, particularly around criminal exploitation and court cases, potential outcomes at court, and dealing with judiciary professionals.

"[The RPC and I] are doing different jobs in different places… unless there's a specific issue that I need to ask the RPC about then our jobs don't normally seem to cross." (Direct Worker)

Direct Workers and RPCs indicated that they felt **the distinction of their roles was very clear**, apart from cases early on when the revised model was first introduced, where there was uncertainty around the specifics of the definition of parental responsibility. Given that the type of support the child received was contingent on this definition (which could vary on a case-by-case basis), there was some deliberation on who should be best placed to work with the child.

As part of their strategic oversight, **RPCs would identify training that Direct Workers could deliver**, or opportunities to visit other agencies.

Working with Service Managers

Unlike the limited interaction between RPCs and Direct Workers, **Service Managers reported working frequently with RPCs**. Most said that they had regular contact with RPCs over the phone or by email and through monthly supervision and team meetings. Frequent contact between RPCs and Service Managers enabled 'live' feedback on successes, concerns or general updates on ways of working within agencies.

Service Managers would often attend high-level regional or strategic meetings, whilst RPCs generally sat in both operational and strategic meetings. In this way the two roles could complement each other, having a combined oversight of how both levels were working in their regions and how they impacted one another. RPCs were also able to escalate concerns through the Service Managers or request their manager's presence at meetings if it was felt that a more senior presence was needed.

Working as a team

At a regional level, the ICTG service reported that it would often **work flexibly within their teams** to meet the needs of their region in the best way. For example, in larger regions, where there may be more local safeguarding boards and modern slavery forums, the Service would work collaboratively to ensure that they covered the whole region. Individual members of the ICTG service said that they were prepared to work tactically to identify how they could cover for each other or align timetables with activities (planning awareness-raising sessions and meetings around the same time to reduce the need for repeated movement across the country). They would also decide who would be best placed to visit which area, based on pre-existing relationships with partners.

Service Managers and RPCs said they would then **share responsibility** to identify appropriate agencies to engage, as well as initiatives or training opportunities where they thought that the input of the ICTG service would be valuable.

4.1.2 Identifying gaps in child trafficking services

ICTG service mapping

RPCs would work to identify gaps within the service provision in their region by undertaking **regional mapping in partnership with the Service Manager and Direct Workers**. RPCs reported that this could involve regular (often quarterly) mapping and planning meetings where team members would assess the types of trafficking across the region and identify risks, as well as potential gaps in awareness and service provision within partner agencies.

ICTG service professionals said risk analysis could involve using ICTG referral data (including types of children being referred to the RPC) and NRM referral data to map areas with a high risk of certain types of exploitation. ICTG teams in some areas would then map these risk 'hot spots' to the corresponding levels of engagement and service provision amongst partners within those areas – identifying opportunities for RPCs to invest further time, and what these actions should be. For example, an ICTG team in one region was looking to link in with health professionals, particularly Accident and Emergency hospital staff and paramedics, who might come across at-risk children without knowing the indicators or signs of trafficking.

It was reported that while formal reviews were quarterly, service mapping was a **continuous process** with the team regularly monitoring and providing feedback on how successful engagement activities had been.

Identifying gaps in provision within services

Stakeholders across the different regions and agencies reported that RPCs would **regularly inform them of wider national or regional trends** to help them to identify gaps within their service. This could sometimes happen on a more strategic level, with RPCs encouraging and supporting social care and youth justice teams to analyse their own available datasets (for example, patterns of caseloads) to identify gaps within their service. On a more ad hoc basis, there were examples of RPCs who would alert teams to emerging hot spots or risks to enable them to mobilise a response in real time.

In areas with **more established exploitation services,** stakeholders noted that **RPCs would work in close partnership** with them. This could involve identifying areas where exploitation services may need more specialised or bespoke training, for example, advanced or refresher NRM training that RPCs could signpost them to, or awareness-raising sessions delivered by the RPCs themselves. In Greater Manchester, the RPC fed into the strategic peer review meetings co-ordinated by the Complex Safeguarding Teams. The primary purpose of these meetings was to consider how support services for exploited

children could be improved by reflecting on how children and young people were responded to in the region.

Cross-working amongst RPCs

RPCs specified ways in which they worked as a team to ensure that individual regions were linked into the patterns of exploitation nationally. **RPCs across regions would have regular contact** in the form of monthly phone meetings and regular away days. They used these sessions to discuss risks and trends in other regions and share best practice to ensure a joined-up approach across the Service.

A close working relationship was also found between RPCs of adjoining regions, such as the East and West Midlands. RPCs would share intelligence or information where children living in their respective regions had been identified or involved in services in the other.

4.1.3 Fostering multi-agency, cross-region working and information sharing

Identifying and addressing blockages

The RPCs' role was expected to identify and break down barriers to multi-agency working within and across regions. In particular, although many police and social care teams worked well together, some teams faced difficulties working together to support children who had been exploited. Where this was the case, stakeholders reported that **RPCs worked to reduce friction.** RPCs would work to dispel tensions by organising joint meetings between teams to encourage agreement on next steps. There were also examples of RPCs facilitating an escalation procedure within modern slavery police teams for social workers to use if they needed information urgently. Where there had been instances of duplicate NRM referrals being raised due to lack of communication between police and social care, RPCs organised a multi-agency NRM working group to ensure a more joined-up approach.

Multi-agency meetings

An important way that RPCs created links between the ICTG service and other agencies was by attending both strategic and operational multi-agency panels**.**

At a strategic level, the number and type of meetings RPCs attended depended on the structure within regions or local authorities. Some local authorities had their own Multi-agency Child Exploitation (MACE) strategy meetings whereas others had cross-area or cross-regional boards. Having a consistent presence on these strategic and planning boards across the region reportedly enabled the RPC (and the ICTG service) to forge links between agencies and improve information sharing across different local authorities. Although there was an acknowledgement that this was still a work in progress, stakeholders both within and outside of the ICTG service felt **RPCs had helped to break down siloed-thinking in some areas to foster a more collaborative atmosphere**.

RPCs in all regions would also attend **relevant operational multi-agency meetings**, where the risks and needs of vulnerable children or young people would be discussed. Some local authorities, particularly in large urban areas, would have a regular meeting focusing on exploitation and trafficking, for example, Missing, Exploited and Trafficked (MET) meetings and MACE meetings. Other local authorities would have more general safeguarding meetings of which child trafficking and exploitation would be one of the items covered, for example, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) meetings. In smaller regions, such as the West Midlands or Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, the RPC would attend all key operational meetings. In large regions with more local authorities, such as Wales, RPCs said they could struggle to attend operational meetings every time.

Stakeholders outside of the ICTG service, particularly those in social care and youth work, saw an RPC presence at these meetings as an **important platform to inform and advise** on whether children had been exploited and to offer suggestions for preventative measures. RPCs would highlight indicators of exploitation in cases where other professionals might not be familiar with them, and would advocate for children as victims, such as by challenge language used that would suggest that children are perpetrators.

"[The RPC] is an integral part of that multi-agency approach to what the circumstances might be… giving ideas, giving thoughts and sometimes it's almost a critical friend role, thinking about 'have we thought about doing this for a young person?'... and because we have those individual discussions in those case panels, it's about [checking] whether we've got those plans right, whether there's anything else we need to think about doing and putting [other agencies] in touch with the social workers, that kind of safety and risk planning." (Operational stakeholder, social care)

Operational stakeholders in the different regions also saw RPC attendance at these meetings as one of the most important ways **of creating relationships and links between the ICTG service and individual front-line staff**. RPCs would create links between key sectors such as social care, youth offending and criminal justice, as well as health, housing, adult services and education. Stakeholders mentioned that RPCs not only forged relationships between the ICTG service and partner agencies, but initiated a network of communication, connecting different services together by passing on contact details and sharing information. This was also the case where there was a lack of communication between the same services across different local areas or boroughs. For example, one RPC encouraged local police teams to liaise with other areas and shared key contacts to facilitate conversations in order to initiate more joined-up working and intelligence sharing.

RPCs would also use attendance at exploitation panels to **raise specific concerns and identify gaps in service provision**. For example, in one area, where a child with a positive conclusive grounds decision had received a long custodial sentence, the RPC raised the lack of the use of the Section 45 defence of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 at an exploitation meeting. The issue was identified as a potential gap in understanding among the judiciary and Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) with regards to criminal exploitation and the potential for defendants in criminal proceedings to benefit from the appropriate

application of the defence under Section 45. This subsequently led to plans for RPC awareness-raising with the CPS and the judiciary to help to ensure more appropriate handling of positive NRM decisions and the application of the Section 45 defence.

Case-by-case basis

Stakeholders noted how RPCs would **broker conversations between agencies for individual children.** This could involve:

- identifying which agencies should be included;

- ensuring that relevant representatives were invited to meetings or copied into emails;

- seeking out input from partners to draft safeguarding plans; and

- working to assign the right lead professional (such as social workers or Youth Offending Team [YOT] workers) to a child – this was seen as particularly important in cases where there were multiple services involved, which could lead to duplication.

"For me it's finding the right contacts and making sure that they're all part of [the safeguarding] *plan. We can often have situations where we've got different services on the ground. It can become overwhelming and it's about making sure that we've got the right people involved at the right time, and that we've done all the things that we need to and that's …what* [the RPC] *helps us to do."* (Operational stakeholder, social care)

For social care professionals who specialised in work with exploited children, the RPC would sometimes form more of a partnership; regularly liaising and identifying opportunities for information sharing and mutual case referrals to the right services.

"Some of the children I come across could potentially be exploited or have been exploited in the past and that's why our relationship works really well because we can...bounce the names off each other, [the RPC] *can refer in to me and vice versa."* (Operational stakeholder, social care)

Embedding within key teams

In areas where experience and knowledge of child trafficking was high, RPCs would sometimes embed within teams to avoid duplication, and co-deliver pieces of work. For example, RPCs were embedded in some YOTs in larger cities and within social care teams specialising in child exploitation. Stakeholders in these statutory child service and YOTs felt that this helped to foster information sharing between themselves and the ICTG service, ensuring consistency of messages and greater collaboration. Although some social workers within specialist teams felt that some duplication of their work and ICTG service activity was unavoidable, embedment in teams was seen to diminish the overlap between these services.

4.1.4 Awareness-raising

Stakeholders mentioned a wide range of different ways that RPCs would raise awareness and train and upskill services within local authorities, both at a strategic and operational level.

"Doing the work has encouraged more awareness-raising. ... I've built a reputation as being the woman to ask…. I've had loads of phone calls that seem to be out of the blue ...Word is slowly getting around that, actually, I'm doing a good job and that I know what I'm doing and maybe they don't know as much as they thought they did [about child trafficking].*"* (RPC)

Raising awareness about indicators and types of child trafficking and exploitation

At a strategic level, RPCs **designed and delivered awareness-raising sessions** on indicators and types of child exploitation to supplement the training that professionals receive from their organisations. The type and length of sessions ranged from short refresher courses to longer and more interactive workshops, including group work and use of videos.

Sessions were delivered to various agency partners such as youth offending, criminal justice, social care and exploitation teams. There were some examples of RPCs delivering sessions to wider multi-agency partners, such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), healthcare professionals, education professionals, counsellors and therapists.

In large regions, RPC awareness-raising sessions on indicators of child exploitation would sometimes be primarily **targeted towards key partners or team managers.** This was done in the hope that the training would be embedded through a trickle-down effect. For example, in one area, 'train the trainer' sessions were run with members of a specialist exploitation team to maximise reach and marry up the training packages of both the ICTG service and specialist teams.

"We're really clear as a service [that] *we don't want to be that rescue organisation where people come to us for everything. It would be much better that we invest the time out in the regions*, [and that] *we build people's confidence, their capacity, their ability to do some independent learning themselves as well."* (Service Manager)

Although the content of the awareness-raising sessions varied, stakeholders across agencies said they could cover:

- best practice around spotting indicators for both child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual exploitation (CSE);

- tips on how to approach culturally sensitive issues;

- local case studies or examples to help to apply these indicators in practice; and

- wider contextual and national information, such as national best practice models and contextualised safeguarding.

"[The training] included: 'Here's what we look out for. Here are some cases in the area that have happened, and signs and symptoms of what exploitation may look like, act like, or sound like, and what processes needed to be put into place for young people and for adults'. *[The RPC]* did this quite extensive training on that." (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

Training content would also be tailored to the awareness levels of individual teams and contextual factors of the local area. For example, in more rural areas where awareness of both CSE and CCE was lower than in the cities, sessions would be more introductory. In areas where familiarity with CCE was lower than CSE, the training would focus on how to understand exploitation in the context of CCE as well as how CCE and CSE could be interlinked.

Stakeholders also observed that **RPC awareness-raising sessions included sections aimed at tackling local or regional misperceptions or knowledge gaps**. For example, challenging the assumption that British children were less likely to be exploited in that area or that County Lines was the only form of CCE in the area. There were also examples of RPCs delivering police-specific sessions on the language to use when dealing with CCE cases to tackle stereotyping and use of victim-blaming language.

Stakeholders also reported that **RPCs developed or signposted them to pamphlets and information sheets** to refer to when assessing cases. Youth offending officers in particular mentioned they had received toolkits on CCE and CSE to identify warning signs and the stages of exploitation amongst the children they work with.

RPCs also raised awareness about indicators by **challenging language at multi-agency panels or meetings**. Stakeholders mentioned RPCs would reinforce and refocus the conversation on child exploitation indicators, highlighting indicators that other professionals may not have seen and to ensure that appropriate language was used.

Raising awareness of the Section 45 defence

Stakeholders reported that RPCs' awareness-raising would involve an introduction or description of the Section 45 defence within the Modern Slavery Act 2015. Areas covered included:

- what the law means;

- when it can and cannot be used; and

- myth busting if there was a sense that it was a 'get out of jail free card'.

Such topics were covered as part of introductory sessions hosted by RPCs in order to complement the existing training that stakeholders received from their own organisations.

Stakeholders reported this training had been delivered as part of wider awareness and upskilling packages to first responders (including police teams), but in some areas RPCs had delivered introductory awareness-raising sessions to some CPS staff, magistrates and the judiciary. RPCs in other areas had also identified this as a next step in their training plans.

Awareness-raising about the NRM

Formal NRM awareness-raising sessions were delivered to first responders by RPCs across the regions, supplementary to training provided to first responders by their own organisations. Stakeholders reported that these sessions covered topics such as:

- the types of information needed for an initial referral;

- the steps of the process including reasonable grounds and conclusive grounds decisions;

- example case studies; and

- a practical exercise for participants to complete referrals.

RPCs would also develop handouts and toolkits to support professionals when submitting an NRM referral. This included:

- a 'crib sheet' or short overview of the benefits of the NRM for the child, parent and professionals (to hand out to wider agencies including health, mental health and education); and

- a toolkit for first responders to refer to, including an indication of when further information was needed at different stages.

"[The RPC] was really helpful in giving us...a table to put all of that information in, and what's expected, what [the Single Competent Authority] expects. So, it's clear for them, but also clear for us. I've shared that with the team, which has been really helpful...so that actually when you send it off to them it's clear, and you're not missing any gaps which potentially you may have without realising." (Operational stakeholder, social care)

There were some instances of RPCs organising and delivering multi-agency NRM awareness-raising sessions. This reportedly meant that different teams (such as social care and the police) could feel **more unified in the process**. Stakeholders from the social care sector reported that they now shared information more freely with other teams and felt more confident in having constructive conversations with police forces.

"[The RPCs were] having sessions with us which has then made us feel more confident and clearer in what we're saying from our social care perspective so that then when we are having conversations with [the police] you kind of know what you're talking about a bit more and you'll feel more confident in your argument basically for why an NRM [referral] is needed or why you think something." (Strategic stakeholder, social care)

Although NRM awareness-raising sessions were predominantly delivered to first responders, there were also some initial sessions to the judiciary, magistrates and the CPS in the East and West Midlands, to complement existing formal training within these organisations. Stakeholders in these regions reported that this was to explain:

- how the NRM process works;

- what it means in pre-sentence reports; and

- how this might relate to children in court who may have been exploited or trafficked.

4.1.5 Supporting front-line professionals in relation to an exploited child

Supporting professionals to identify indicators of child exploitation

There were many examples given of RPCs providing in-depth advice and guidance to front-line staff about the children they were supporting. This could take the form of one-off or ongoing emails, and face-to-face and telephone guidance where required. The quantitative data shows that a large proportion of the contact[46] that RPCs had with other professionals to support a child was with front-line workers, especially social workers (34%), YOTs (14%) and the police (10%). RPCs reportedly also often attended relevant individual risk-management meetings, child strategy meetings, Child in Need meetings or child protection conferences to ensure that they understood the context. In some areas, RPCs would set up regular clinics within local authority teams, where front-line staff could raise questions or requests for help.

The most common reasons RPCs contacted other professionals were:

- to support work related to the child's NRM referral (37%);

- to discuss the safeguarding of the child (23%); and

- social care needs (16%).

The nature of this support tended to depend on the professional working with the child, and the circumstances of the child they were working with. For professionals with a low awareness of potential child exploitation indicators, RPCs would help them:

- to determine whether exploitation was involved;

- ensure that professionals were signposted to the right support; and

- advise on next steps and options available to professionals, including what disruption tactics police could use to prevent exploitation.

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[46] 'Contact' is defined as an interaction between an RPC and another professional on behalf of a child, whether through in-person meetings, email, letters, or by phone (including calls, messages and video calls). The percentage reflects the proportion of all contact that RPCs had with each type of professional.

"I give advice on some of the meetings and I'll get a few phone calls [about] *their concerns that perhaps the police aren't pursuing the full range of disruption tactics which could be used, or they are not considered trafficking offences."* (RPC)

Supporting front-line staff throughout criminal proceedings

Youth offending practitioners reported that RPCs would **advise throughout the court process** on how to recognise cases of CCE. 'Criminal justice' was the subject of 8% of all contact between RPCs and other professionals. This would involve the RPC providing guidance on how to word or frame pre-sentencing reports to ensure that the court was aware of the circumstances and level of exploitation faced by the child. In some cases, youth offending workers said that this included advocating for the use and application of the Section 45 defence of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 in the pre-sentencing report, and ensuring that individuals such as YOT members were applying it correctly.

Supporting front-line staff with NRM referrals

Stakeholders also reported that RPCs delivered significant **hands-on support to front-line staff in youth offending, social care and police teams when referring to the NRM**. This support could involve:

- step-by-step guidance on the referral form;

- advising on the types of information, language and evidence needed; and

- reviewing forms before submission.

This is reflected in the quantitative data, as support with NRM referrals was given as the most common reason that RPCs contacted other professionals on behalf of a child (37% of all contact).

Participants also said that **RPCs would co-ordinate information for NRM referrals where multi-agency input was needed.** RPCs were seen by some to be an important conduit between social care and the police for NRM referrals. RPCs would help social care teams to reach the right police officers, gather the information needed and advocate for the need of an NRM referral if there were disagreements between services.

"I think part of our role is brokering those discussions and helping people understand both sides of that discussion, and really trying to help people pick what that means to everybody involved and still recognising that an NRM might need to go in even if not everybody around the table agrees that the young person hold[s] *a particular status or not."* (Service manager)

Supporting front-line staff throughout NRM decisions

Some stakeholders, notably those in social care and youth offending, gave examples of when RPCs **regularly checked in with relevant agencies and followed up with the**

SCA. A tenth (10%) of the contact RPCs had with other professionals in support of a child was with NRM decision makers in the SCA.

"[The RPC is] really positive in actually updating me almost every week … saying: 'Okay, I've changed it a little bit more. Can you just give me an update on has anything changed? Do I need to update the NRM further in terms of further information that's been received from your end, etc?'" (Operational stakeholder, social care)

RPCs would also **advise first responders to keep records of updates on the case** to ensure that they had enough information to respond to questions from the SCA over the decision period. Professionals also mentioned RPCs had advised them **on whether to approach the SCA with a challenge to a negative NRM decisions** and helped co-ordinate the approach if needed – identifying what evidence should be clearer or sharper and co-ordinating information from other agencies.

"She advised us to keep notes of every single encounter, every text message from that point on just in case [the SCA] *needs that information. So, she kept us, kind of, in the loop on what would happen afterwards as well."* (Operational stakeholder, youth offending)

4.2 What factors led to success in the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' role?

Where the RPCs' role had worked well, the skills and expertise of the RPCs themselves, as well as any prior connections formed in previous roles were seen as important contributing factors. In particular, the ability to build relationships with different agencies and local authorities was seen as a key part of successful implementation and delivery, as this enabled the RPCs to deliver other aspects of their role (supporting and awareness-raising among professionals). Alongside the relationship-building skills of the RPCs, the strategic and independent nature of the role, as well as the openness of local authorities, were seen as important enablers to the role working well.

4.2.1 Regional Practice Co-ordinators' knowledge, skills and experience

RPCs' expertise

Both operational and strategic stakeholders gave positive feedback about the **depth and breadth of knowledge offered by RPCs** on all relevant forms of child exploitation. It was felt that they brought specialist expertise above and beyond services already in place and enabled Direct Workers to have a greater focus on immigration procedure and law.

"It's the high level of expert knowledge … when [the RPC] *attended multi-agency meetings all the feedback is positive because* [the RPC] *brings an area of expertise at a level where I think people are still finding their way."* (Operational stakeholder, social care)

Stakeholders also reported that the **RPCs' contextual and historical knowledge of exploitation in the regions** enabled a more efficient approach to identifying children who

were at risk of exploitation. This was understood as particularly important by stakeholders within local authorities with limited experience of CCE and County Lines.

"[The RPC's] knowledge has made all the difference…I think if another person had come in without the awareness of the trends, the background history of exploitation, the trafficking within the borders, and everything that she knows, it would not be as effective." (Operational stakeholder, youth offending)

RPCs' ability to build relationships

The RPCs' personability, positive attitude and willingness to help seemed to generally work well when creating links and building trust between agencies.

"She's on the end of the phone… She's somebody that I absolutely trust and advocate for what she can tell you about children that are being trafficked and because she's very responsive, if you've any queries at all she'll give that response." (Operational stakeholder, social care)

An **understanding of how agencies work** tended to enable RPCs to approach services sensitively. Some police stakeholders felt that RPCs had been able to offer practical solutions to blockages in communication with social services and youth offending services due to the understanding that RPCs had of police systems.

RPCs in initial adopter sites found it **easier to build new partnerships with services due to the established presence of the ICTG service**. In some instances, RPCs had worked as Direct Workers in the region as part of the old model, which meant that they already had contacts or had worked with teams previously.

4.2.2 The nature of the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' role

Strategic element of the role

ICTG service professionals felt that the **RPCs' role significantly contributed to strategic planning**. RPCs were able to carve out time to develop strategic plans, which was seen in contrast to Direct Workers who had high volumes of direct work. This meant that they were able to identify key partners and gaps within the Service and focus their time more effectively.

"I think it's really good in terms of being able to devote time to working with professionals and establishing relationships. Forming links with persons that perhaps an ICTG who does a lot of direct work might not have the time to cultivate." (Direct Worker)

However, RPCs mentioned they could sometimes **struggle to find the right balance between the strategic component of their role and supporting operational staff with individual cases**. Particularly once the ICTG service had been implemented in a region for some time, RPCs reported they could receive numerous requests from professionals asking for support. This could mean that strategic awareness-raising or relationship-building plans were de-prioritised. For example, one RPC had developed a training

programme to embed NRM champions within a local authority but had not had time to launch the initiative due to their heavy operational workload. Ultimately, RPCs felt that the needs of individual children would always be prioritised over the more strategic elements.

"*Because I have to do operational work and strategic work, I don't have enough time to do both. When I've got a child on my caseload who I'm trying to find support for, and there is nothing, that has to be my priority...The needs of the children always come first but there are things we can be doing to improve things on a more strategic level that I can't implement because I don't have time.*" (RPC)

Flexibility of the role

RPCs also felt that the **flexibility and open nature of the RPCs' role had given them the opportunity to tailor their offer** to the needs of each local authority. This was understood as important due to the widely varying needs of different local authorities.

However, there was an acknowledgement among later adopter sites that this **initial mapping of regional need could take time**. ICTG service professionals mentioned significant time-investment had been needed to identify where and how the RPCs' role would be beneficial in each local authority. This was not required for the Direct Worker role, which was uniform in nature across areas and regions.

Independence of the RPCs' role

Being **unaffiliated with local authorities or services** was seen as an enabler to the RPCs' role working well. RPCs were rarely viewed as biased or working in the interests of a particular service, which enabled them to create trust and collaboration across services.

"*I think being independent is such an important part of the role because we're not in anybody's pocket, I suppose. … no service can say that I'm biased or I'm that … linked with the police or social care, or whatever.*" (RPC)

4.3 What were the challenges?

Where the role ran into some difficulties, external factors such as the awareness and attitudes of local authority teams, perceptions of some police forces and resourcing issues were often the contributing factors. RPCs could face challenges creating partnerships with social services and YOTs if these teams were reluctant to engage, and RPCs could struggle to work alongside some police forces. In addition, high turnover and resourcing issues within public authorities could undermine the embedding of best practice. In large regions, RPCs could struggle to ensure full coverage.

4.3.1 Attitudes and awareness of services

Openness of local authorities and services

Stakeholders generally **felt that some local authorities were more open and willing to work with the ICTG service than others**. RPCs in most regions reported that they had

initially faced pockets of resistance from some local authorities. This was not generally felt to stem from individual services, but from the varying degrees of awareness across local authorities as a whole. Stakeholders felt that some local authorities could have lower baseline levels of awareness and expertise of child exploitation, which could make it harder for RPCs to convey how their role could support local authorities. In some instances, agencies would therefore reportedly be reluctant to work with the ICTG service due to a lack of familiarity with the issues or terms of reference.

Difficulties in establishing the RPC service within social care and YOTs sometimes occurred where **services did not feel that they needed RPC support**. This could stem from misperceptions that child exploitation was not an issue that affected their area or that their services already had adequate expertise. In these circumstances, RPCs reported that it had taken time to build trust and create links as an independent organisation. However, most felt that they had seen improvements over time, with more referrals or requests for help and training coming in from services.

"It's taken a while if I'm honest. I think there's an element of: 'We know what we're doing, and we don't need you and why [are] *you here?' And I'm an outsider that's come in, and… it's just barriers."* (RPC)

RPCs also noted that these challenges could occur if **there were misperceptions that their role was to scrutinise services or to uncover bad practice**. This was particularly the case where there were specialised social care services to respond to child exploitation and trafficking within local authorities. RPCs felt that they could sometimes be viewed as competition, which made it harder to create partnerships.

"I think it's a bit of a threat to them, they see us as competition. If we demonstrate that we're good in [the area]*, then it kind of makes them feel like they're not needed."* (RPC)

Working with some police teams

Stakeholders across the board highlighted the difficulties with fostering collaborative working or advocating the best interests of children when working with some police teams. Although it was clearly acknowledged that this was not the case with all teams, it was felt that there were still **pockets of reluctance from some police forces to engage with the RPC, support NRM referrals and/or use modern slavery powers**. This was more often cited in areas where there was not a specialist police team dedicated to modern slavery.

Tight resourcing and lack of capacity within police forces were understood as key drivers of this. Participants acknowledged that police teams were often dealing with high caseloads and conflicting priorities, which meant that responses to other agencies could be delayed.

It was also seen as down to **a general lack of understanding among some police teams about child exploitation as well as the purpose of the NRM**. It was reported that some police teams considered child exploitation, particularly CCE, from an angle that did not always incorporate safeguarding. Rather, stakeholders felt that the culture of some

police teams was to consider children who may have been exploited as perpetrators first and foremost. This could lead to friction with the ICTG service as well as social care and YOTs, who felt they were approaching CCE and CSE from a different, more child-focused perspective. Both sides could feel the other was blocking their work; for example, social services feeling frustrated at the use of 'victim blaming language', and the police feeling that positioning children as victims was obstructing their ability to 'do their job'.

"We…really struggle with some of our relationships with police colleagues. Their agenda within that region is about lowering crime, and their operations, which tend to be focused around criminal exploitation and sexual exploitation, is very much focused on perpetrator-led… it can be a real challenge in that region to get police in particular to see the child and to see the story." (Service Manager)

RPCs therefore invested significant time in **tackling police misperceptions of the NRM**. Some police forces initially interpreted NRM referrals as a 'get out of jail free card' and a way for services to disrupt police investigations.

"I think they see us very much big on the side of a child over and above everything else, and not really seeing the wider perspective around criminality that's going on. So sometimes we have to do a bit more work around explaining that." (RPC)

4.3.2 Practical and resourcing issues

Resource of social care teams

Social workers said that they **could struggle to take up the RPCs' offer of support or attend awareness-raising sessions** due to their heavy workload, limiting the reach of the RPC.

Youth offending stakeholders highlighted that lack of capacity meant that **social workers could struggle to respond to urgent requests.** This could hinder their own teams and RPCs to respond to emergencies, such as submitting NRM referrals within tight timeframes.

RPCs also said that they had faced **difficulty embedding knowledge and processes for things such as the NRM** within social care teams. Front-line staff, who often had high workloads and limited capacity, could initially be suspicious of the NRM as 'just another form' or an extra burden. In some regions, there could be confusion between the benefits of the NRM and other systems. RPCs reported it had taken extra time and effort to persuade social care professionals of the importance of the NRM in some local authorities.

High turnover of local authority staff

High turnover of staff, especially in social care services, was said to impede the RPCs' capacity to embed training. RPCs reported that individuals they had trained as part of a group session or through intense one-on-one support could move on to another department or area, which meant that knowledge was lost.

In addition, there were concerns that strategies employed by RPCs to raise awareness could only work so much without the support of wider strategic input and internal cultural shifts within the local authorities themselves. To see sustained change, ICTG service staff felt that local authorities needed to enshrine best practice support for cases of CCE and CSE within their working practices, policies and procedures. RPCs felt they could have limited influence on this, particularly if pivotal supporters of the Service moved roles.

"Unless local authorities have it enshrined within their own working practices and their own policies and procedures – which some local authorities do, some don't, I think – then it's very difficult for us to keep continually going out and doing awareness-raising, because you could be on an endless cycle of awareness-raising." (Direct Worker)

Travelling and size

The **size of the regions covered by individual RPCs was also seen as a challenge**. This could apply for both the geographical miles that RPCs needed to travel, but also the number of local authorities within regions. RPCs and ICTG service teams could face challenges in ensuring a blanket-reach across regions with multiple local authorities.

Where local authorities were combined or had similar structures for responding to exploitation, RPCs said that it was easier to circulate comprehensive awareness-raising materials and encourage information sharing, even if services were at different stages of development. However, in areas where local authorities were not joined-up or the region was geographically large, it was harder to reconcile differences in stages of advancement and priorities, and to promote joined-up working. This challenge could be heightened in rural areas where transport links were disjointed or remote working facilities were undeveloped. ICTG teams would aim to mitigate this as much as possible by prioritising and sharing tasks and attendance at board meetings between the RPC and the Service Manager.

Information dissemination

Some stakeholders in initial **adopter sites, especially in social care and youth offending services, felt that there had been a lack of co-ordinated communication about the ICTG service transition** to the RPC model. Some reported that they had heard about the restructure 'by chance' and felt that the reasons for the change had been unclear. Although most subsequently felt that they could understand the merits of the new model, there were a handful who were still concerned about the lack of direct ICTG contact afforded to children with a figure of parental responsibility.[47]

Similar issues were also reported in some later adopter sites. Stakeholders felt that there could have been more **co-ordination between team leaders in local authorities and the ICTG service** to ensure that operational staff were more aware of the RPCs' role and what additional services and advice they could offer.

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[47] This is further expanded on in Chapter 5.

"I don't feel there is much joined-up thinking between [the youth offending service] *and ICTG service… no top down information about the Service being rolled out, what the role is, what the benefits are of working with them... no clear, practical additional support they could offer us."* *(Operational stakeholder, youth offending)*

5. Outcomes of the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' role

This chapter outlines how and to what extent stakeholders felt that the delivery of the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' (RPC) role (set out in the previous chapter) has had an impact on services and children across the six early adopter sites. It is structured around the three main types of beneficiaries of the role:

- the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service and Direct Workers;

- social care and criminal justice professionals; and

- children.

The outcomes for each of these groups were seen as interlinked. The RPCs' support and guidance to professionals consequently could lead to better outcomes for the children they worked with.

Stakeholders noted that it was harder to measure outcomes for children related to the RPCs' role compared to Direct Workers due to the varied and flexible nature of the role. However, it was generally felt that RPCs had a positive impact on professionals' awareness of child exploitation, as well as their ability to recognise indicators of exploitation and understand how they could support children (including through National Referral Mechanism [NRM] referrals). Stakeholders also felt that RPCs had a positive impact on the resource and coverage of the ICTG service as a whole. They perceived positive outcomes for children, with more examples of multi-service and holistic support packages. Although stakeholders reported that they had seen concrete success factors, such as increases in the number of positive reasonable and conclusive grounds NRM decisions, they did not feel it was possible to causally link these solely to the RPCs' role. It was felt that there were numerous other agencies and programmes in place working to similar goals within regions that could have contributed to the increased positive decisions. There were also some calls for a slight adjustment to the role, allowing RPCs to have discretionary direct input with certain children when required.

It is important to note the research team cannot clearly attribute perceived changes or impacts to the RPCs' role. These findings are based on stakeholder perception and there is no way to isolate the effects of the addition of the RPCs' role compared to other factors.

5.1 Outcomes for the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian service and Direct Workers

There was evidence that the RPCs' role may have had a positive impact on the work of Direct Workers and Service Managers. This was reported as primarily due to the increased capacity of Direct Workers, improved flexibility and reach of the ICTG service, and greater strategic support provided to the Service Managers.

5.1.1 Direct Workers

Some Direct Workers reported that the revised model had allowed them **to hone their expertise better**, as a result of having a more defined area of casework. As outlined in Chapter 3, children without a figure of parental responsibility in the UK were less likely to experience child criminal exploitation (CCE) than UK nationals. The RPCs' role has therefore meant that Direct Workers could focus and specialise in certain areas, such as immigration processes and legislation, and refer to RPC colleagues for specialised knowledge in areas such as the youth criminal justice system if needed.

"[The RPC] is very personable so she is liked by other professionals... she has much more experience and knowledge around British victims of criminal exploitation and CSE that I think that she was probably able to target them a bit more appropriately than I was." (Direct Worker)

Another notable reported benefit of the introduction of the RPCs' role to Direct Workers was an **increased capacity to focus on their direct work with children**. Direct Workers said that they had experienced more time to plan their work, read supporting material and spend with the children they were supporting. The latter – time dedicated to building a relationship and fostering trust – was said to be particularly important for ensuring that children received the best outcomes.

"Whereas previously, when we had huge caseloads, it felt very much like crisis management…since the RPC role has been introduced… I've felt able to devote more time to the young people I was working with, more quality time, around building up relationships, and doing things with young people that I'd not previously had a chance to." (Direct Worker)

Figure 2 clearly highlights an increase in capacity for Direct Workers after the introduction of the RPCs' role, and the subsequent knock-on impact on the time Direct Workers spent with children on average in the initial adopter sites.[48] It shows a large decrease in the average caseload per Direct Worker and a notable increase in the average number of monthly meetings that children had with Direct Workers between January and April 2019, after the introduction of the RPCs' role (children were transitioned to RPC caseloads between January and March 2019). This would appear to support the findings from the qualitative analysis. However, it must be made clear that causation cannot be determined – there may be other factors that have influenced the rise in the average number of meetings between Direct Workers and the children they support.

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[48] Greater Manchester, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and Wales.
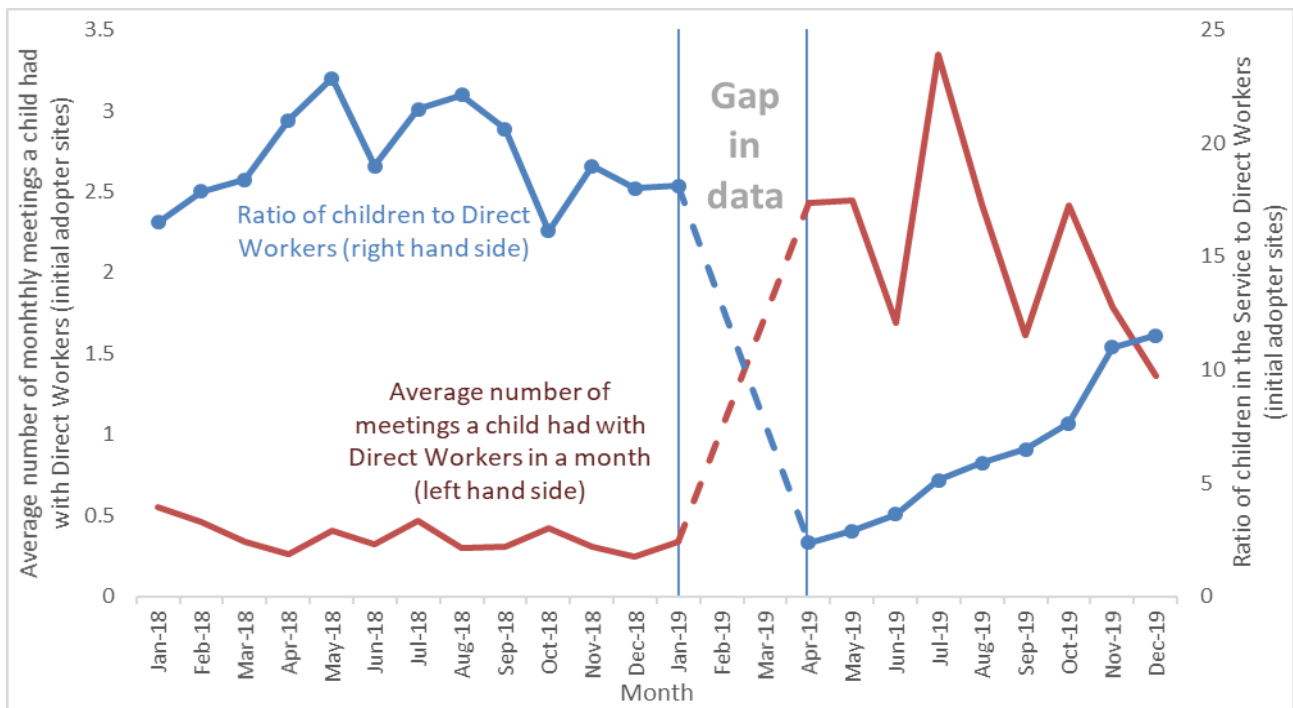
Figure 2: Ratio of children to Direct Workers, and average monthly number of meetings each child had with their Direct Worker in initial adopter sites, January 2018 to December 2019[49]

5.1.2 Independent Child Trafficking Guardian service and Service Managers

Stakeholders, especially within the ICTG service, felt the RPCs' role had enabled increased reach of the ICTG service. Having a dedicated RPC role with a strategic focus arguably enabled targeted partnerships, and more engagement from relevant partners. This was echoed by stakeholders external to the ICTG service, who also felt that RPCs had strengthened the knowledge and the offer of the ICTG service overall, adding to its value. Reported success factors included stakeholder perception of an increased number of referrals to the ICTG service and improved connections to local agencies. However, some stakeholders were keen to highlight how these were likely due to several factors including the joint efforts of other ICTG service professionals.

"[The RPC role] *has given us more depth and capacity* [to] *take a step back from direct work and really look at what needs to be put in place to support organisations to develop their response around CCE and CSE."* (Service Manager)

5.2 Outcomes for professionals and services

Stakeholders were generally very positive about the impact of the RPCs' role on professionals, particularly among social care, youth offending and police teams. There was evidence that the role may have had a positive impact on professionals' awareness of

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[49] Data for February and March 2019 was not collected as children were transitioned in-month between Direct Workers and RPCs. As such, it would be difficult to distinguish the outcomes of a child, as their transition would have included both direct work and RPC work during this time. The ICTG service concentrated on safely transitioning children between the two elements of the service.

indicators of child exploitation (particularly for CCE) and how to improve support for children. Feedback from stakeholders indicated that improvements in services' awareness, confidence and capacity to submit referrals and navigate the NRM process was particularly noticeable. RPCs were seen to have had less impact on awareness and confidence in the use of the Section 45 (of the Modern Slavery Act 2015) defence, but this was generally felt to be because of external factors such as the complexity of the legislation and the sensitivities involved in trying to navigate the use of the defence at court and with the police.

5.2.1 Awareness, skills and confidence to support children

Awareness of signs of child exploitation

Stakeholders generally felt that the RPCs' role had **improved professionals' awareness of indicators relating to child exploitation** – across many regions and teams. Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) or social care teams in city areas felt that RPCs had been effective in **providing them with reassurance and confirming suspicions about children at risk of exploitation**.

"I think it's unpicking the information that I'm concerned about, so I might say something doesn't sit right with me and I'll talk it through with her around what my concerns are. If something's just not quite adding up, she'll be able to advise on why it's not adding up and give me an example of what happens when they're exploited type-of-thing. She'll…confirm my concerns and validate them, but she'll be able to translate that into how that links to trafficking." (Operational stakeholder, youth offending)

Stakeholders reported that they were **now able to identify potential warning signs that they may have previously missed** due to the RPCs' advice and awareness-raising sessions. Some gave examples of new pieces of knowledge that they attributed to RPC support such as:

- the role transportation can take in trafficking;

- the use of 'low-level movement'; and

- how the indicators of trafficking and exploitation overlap.

Operational staff within social care and youth offending mentioned how their teams had improved risk assessments and felt more confident when applying what they had learnt to the children they work with.

"A social worker ...who had very much always been of the opinion that 'the kid is an offender and they're making their own lifestyle choices', has recently referred two young people [to the RPC] *because they went along to one of the* [RPC's] *awareness-raising sessions and it was a bit of a lightbulb moment...they're starting to actually go, 'Oh, some of those things that I thought were just the kid being disruptive are actually indicators of trafficking, aren't they?'"* (Service Manager)

"We go into training and get told all the time, you know, 'These are the warning signs,' but as a professional, unless you're literally faced with that every single day, that goes out of your head. So, to have someone come in and remind you … it's been quite a bit that [the RPC] *has filled, really."* (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

Stakeholders felt that there was **stronger evidence of the RPCs' impact on awareness of CCE indicators compared with child sexual exploitation (CSE)** in some areas. Where this was the case, it was generally linked to the lower baseline awareness of and capacity to respond to CCE in local authorities compared with CSE. In these areas, the RPCs' work to upskill and increase awareness of CCE would be noticeable due to the greater relative improvement in awareness prior to the RPC role's introduction.

However, some professionals **felt that the RPCs' role had a limited impact on their awareness and understanding** of child trafficking and exploitation due to their high levels of expertise. This was the case particularly in local authorities with embedded specialist units or dedicated funding streams. On a wider level, it was felt the RPCs' role was one of many initiatives to improve service awareness and understanding of CCE and CSE in the area – and any shifts over the year could not be solely attributed to the RPCs' role. There were also limitations to the RPCs' impact due to the **barriers faced when trying to train service teams within some local areas**. The challenges of capacity within social care teams and working with some police forces has been highlighted above, but in addition RPCs mentioned that there was difficulty reaching the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), magistrates and the judiciary, due to lack of contacts.

Awareness of how to support children who have been exploited

There was evidence that RPCs had a positive impact on professionals' awareness of *how* to support children after they had been identified as experiencing exploitation. Stakeholders said that they **felt more aware of the 'next steps'** once exploitation risks had been identified – in terms of which agencies to involve and why, and how best to support the individual child. YOTs felt that the support received from RPCs regarding children who were facing prosecution had:

- helped them to identify alternative routes to the criminal justice system; and

- improved their confidence about who they could turn to if they needed specialist advice.

Police stakeholders also said that they felt they had become more efficient after their work with RPCs, and felt they were able to respond at pace to incidents of child exploitation.

"I've seen [my team] *grow in confidence in their discussions and…around what responsibility need*[s] *to lie with other agencies in terms of dealing with harmful adults."* (Strategic stakeholder, youth offending)

"*The RPC has played a key role in equipping the team with the knowledge to take on* [CCE] *and use this info quickly. It has led to young people being routinely screened for exploitation.*" (Operational stakeholder, youth offending)

Awareness of and capacity to submit NRM referrals

Stakeholders reported **feeling more aware of the NRM and felt more confident to submit NRM referrals** and navigate the decisions process due to RPC input. Social care and youth offending teams said that they felt more confident that they knew how:

- to submit an NRM referral;

- to record updates;

- to answer questions from the Single Competent Authority (SCA)[50]

They had also gained a general awareness that an NRM referral is a process, rather than a one-off submission.

"*[The RPC]* has had a massive contribution to helping people understand that it's not a one-off submission, but it's a process, … It's probably much more of a holistic process now than where perhaps maybe a few years ago you just sent a paper copy in and you probably did very little with it afterwards.*" (Service Manager)

Stakeholders also reported feeling more **aware of when an NRM referral would be needed under different circumstances – including for less clear-cut cases –** because of RPC awareness-raising. Youth offending professionals mentioned that they were now aware that they would need to make referrals for a child who had been arrested or charged with a criminal offence if there could be an element of exploitation, when they perhaps would not have done before.

"*So, they've helped lower the bar... previously we wouldn't have made referrals around a child or young person who's arrested and charged through the court for an offence, for example.*" (Strategic stakeholder, youth offending – late adopter)

"*One of the things we've learned through* [the RPC] *role …is that a lot of people's thresholds for submitting an NRM are quite high and actually potentially are too high because we're almost waiting for the ones where there was the entirely clear picture of trafficking having happened, as opposed to those where sometimes it may be a little bit grey, we may not be entirely sure but actually there's enough indicators to warrant it going in* [referred into the NRM], *for it to be considered."* (Strategic stakeholder, social care – early adopter)

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[50] The SCA receives NRM referrals and is responsible for making 'reasonable' and 'conclusive grounds' decisions.

Teams from all sectors felt that they were **producing NRM referrals to a higher quality**. Stakeholders reported that the proportion of referrals made that resulted in positive reasonable and conclusive grounds decisions was much higher. They believed that this was partly due to the guidance of RPCs on how to improve the quality of information in an NRM referral, as well as giving them the confidence to challenge SCA decisions, as appropriate and in line with the NRM policy on reconsideration requests.

"With the NRM, it was this form that just felt… impossible to complete to be honest. I think… there'd been quite a number of rejections from the NRM, because they hadn't received support on how to complete it. And with [the RPC] *support, it has definitely… I had, personally, a reasonable grounds decision with their support. I don't think I would've got that without* [the RPC's] *support."* (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

Quantitative evidence drawn from the NRM data seems to support stakeholders' views of a higher incidence of positive reasonable grounds decisions. Figure 3 shows the proportion of reasonable grounds decisions made in ICTG sites compared with non-ICTG sites. This is shown for the ten months between March 2018 and January 2019, and the ten months between February and December 2019,[51] in order to observe any possible influence that RPCs have had since becoming established in their region. Figure 4 shows the same information, but for conclusive grounds decisions.

Figure 3 shows that while the proportion of positive reasonable grounds decisions increased from 81% to 90% in non-ICTG sites (an increase of 9 percentage points), the increase in ICTG sites was notably larger (from 77% to 92%, a 15 percentage point increase). Figure 4 shows that there was a marginal difference in the increase of positive conclusive grounds decisions in ICTG sites (80% to 86% - an increase of 6 percentage points) and non-ICTG sites (72% to 82%, a 10 percentage point increase). These figures would appear to suggest that there has been an improvement in the proportion of positive reasonable grounds decisions in line with stakeholders' views. However, it is important to note that the observed trend cannot be definitively attributed to the introduction of the RPCs' role as there could be other factors influencing the change.

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[51] The data was split in this way as it was assumed that it would take a few months between an RPC being established in a region and any potential observed effect of them improving NRM decision-making quality. February 2019 was chosen specifically as it the first month that there were a reasonable number of children on RPC caseloads (22). Before this, there were only nine children directly supported by RPCs.
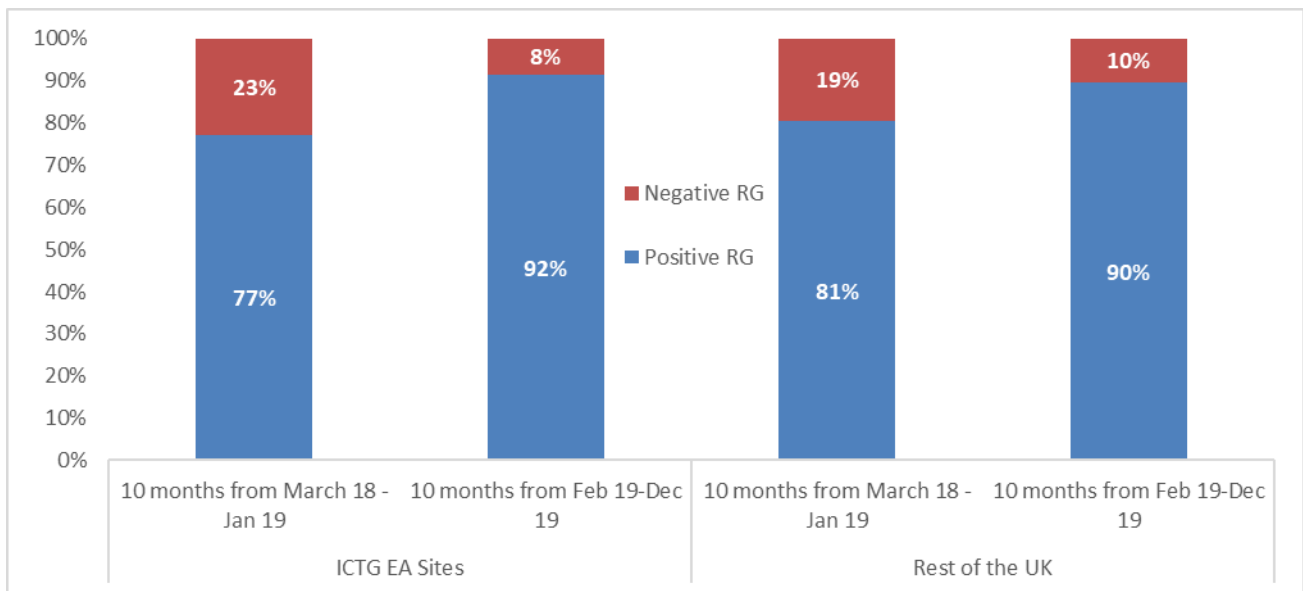
Figure 3: Proportion of NRM reasonable grounds decisions made, ICTG Early Adopter sites compared with non-ICTG sites, March 2018 to January 2019 and February 2019 to December 2019
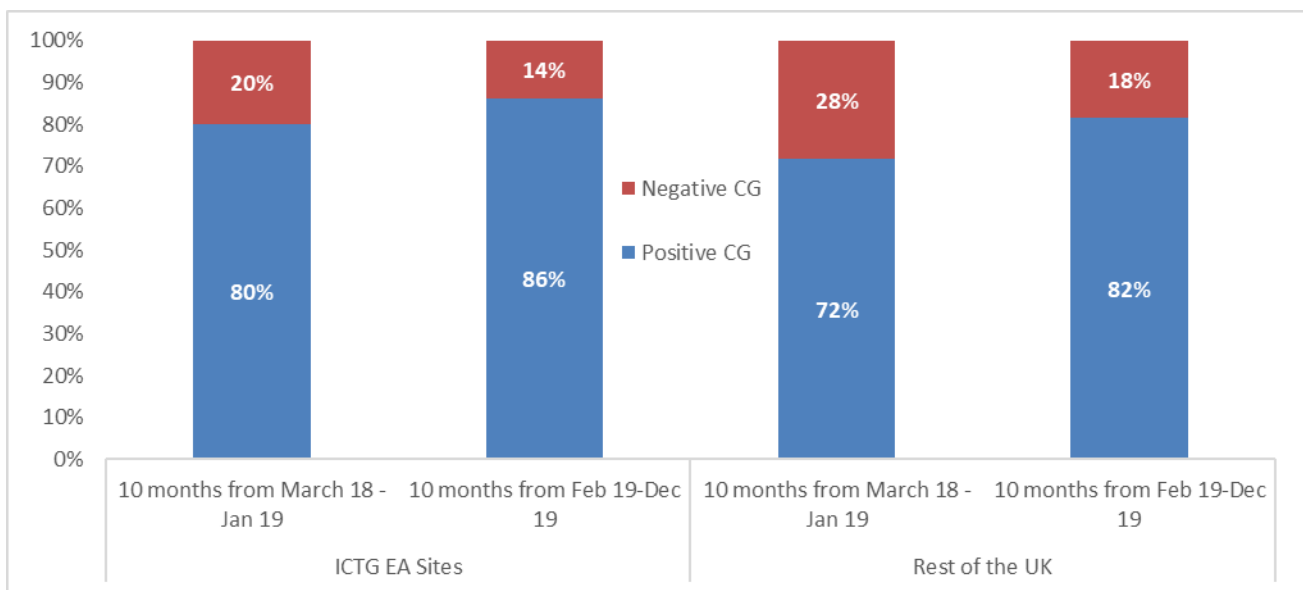
Figure 4: Proportion of NRM conclusive grounds decisions made, ICTG Early Adopter sites compared with non-ICTG sites, March 2018 to January 2019 and February 2019 to December 2019

There were also examples of teams building on the advice of RPCs **to design and embed processes to monitor and record NRM referrals.** In these instances, front-line staff kept records of NRM referrals and tracked the progress of decision stages. This created datasets used to analyse and improve on the services provided.

"I think it's changed massively from people not really knowing what to do, to knowing – we've got an in-built workflow for it for the staff to use, so that we can track and record things, and chase it where we do get responses that we're not happy with, feeling confident about that challenge." (Operational Staff, Social Care)

However, as with other types of awareness-raising, there were some stakeholders who felt that the RPCs' role had a limited impact. This was sometimes due to professionals **already feeling equipped** to refer to the NRM as they had submitted multiple NRM referrals prior to the introduction of the RPCs' role.

There was also evidence that there were some teams in the later adopter sites that RPCs had yet to reach. Some social care and youth offending stakeholders mentioned they felt that not all professionals were aware that the NRM was a process with multiple stages and one stakeholder had not been aware of NRM awareness-raising sessions.

Confidence and awareness of using the Modern Slavery Act 2015 Section 45 defence

There was a general acknowledgment among stakeholders that **awareness-raising about the Section 45 defence was at an earlier stage** compared to RPCs' efforts to upskill professionals about indicators of child exploitation or the NRM. Although some felt that they were starting to see a positive change, progress was generally felt to be slower. A handful of stakeholders, primarily youth offending workers, felt more confident and aware of the legislation after RPC training sessions or guidance on the defence for inclusion in court reports. These stakeholders could cite seeing examples of when the legislation had been used, but very few had seen prosecutions.

"I added [Section 45] *to my court report ...to just outline that obviously we felt he'd been coerced, forced to do something."* (Operational stakeholder, youth offending)

The reasons for this slower change were generally cited as external factors to the RPCs' efforts. Generally, the baseline level of awareness amongst professions in all sectors about the legislation was very low. Stakeholders interviewed felt that the Section 45 defence was in **its early stages of infancy**, with very few professionals successfully using it as part of a support package for a child.

Criminal justice professionals highlighted how **legislation around child exploitation can be complex**, which makes it harder to engage with and understand how to apply it to the children they work with. There was some confusion about whether professionals had come across the defence used in practice. Youth offending stakeholders would mention examples of when CCE charges had been reduced or dropped but did not always see this as linked to the use of the Section 45 defence. Stakeholders understood the importance of children receiving positive reasonable or conclusive grounds through NRM referrals and often felt this to be the main or sole reason behind reduced sentences or dropped charges.[52] Even when youth offending professionals could name a time when RPCs had

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[52] In DS, *R.* v *(Rev 1)* [2020] EWCA Crim 285 (28 February 2020) the judge highlighted that the jury is responsible for deciding the facts relevant to the status of the defendant as a victim of trafficking and therefore whether Section 45 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 applies. The interviews in this assessment were conducted before this judgment and therefore reflect stakeholder experiences at the time of the interviews.

advised and guided them in the use of the defence to support a child, some still felt that they lacked the confidence to use it again in practice.

Attitudes and awareness of some criminal justice professionals (particularly the CPS, magistrates, the judiciary and some police forces) were seen as significant barriers to improvements. Stakeholders felt that many courts were very behind on awareness of the defence. Social care and youth offending professionals mentioned that they could face forceful pushback from the courts system when considering the use of the defence. Social workers in particular felt that they lacked confidence in the court domain and would back down 'too easily' if confronted by the CPS or magistrates about using the defence.

In addition, stakeholders within the police felt that there was a **perception that the legislation was untested among some police forces**. Police stakeholders mentioned it could be a difficult subject to broach with police officers and RPCs had faced challenges encouraging modern slavery teams to use the defence. However, it was acknowledged that RPCs were generally managing these situations professionally, and that advocacy for its use would become easier once there were more success stories to highlight in the region.

"[The RPC] *has been quite mature in their approach, in terms of where there's been a professional disagreement around use of the Section 45* [defence]. [Section 45] *can be a potentially damaging situation for partnership... it's not an easy subject to broach with police officers…... *[the RPCs] *been really aware of that, and the approach has been really measured. I'm most impressed with that."* (Strategic stakeholder, criminal justice – late adopter)

5.2.2 Embedding best practice

Embedding best practice within local authorities

In terms of how far RPCs had managed to embed increased awareness on CCE and CSE and best practice within local authorities, there was **some evidence of wider systems change**. Despite the challenge of high turnover among local authority staff, there were examples of operational staff acting as advocates following RPC awareness-raising, offering advice and guidance to other teams or sectors on child exploitation indicators and the NRM.

"*With the training that we've received, we can then take that into the education, into the community, and then into professional environments and be more aware of CSE and CCE, and we'll share our knowledge with other people. So, I think, from a trickle-down effect, it's been incredibly effective.*" (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

Shift in perceptions

Participants also felt that the RPCs' strategic and operational awareness-raising on child exploitation had been an important part of **altering misperceptions** in certain local

authorities and teams. Within local authorities that had reportedly thought themselves immune from child exploitation, stakeholders noted a change in attitude, with teams having a greater understanding of the issues and a greater awareness of how to recognise it.

"Since the RPC has been on board she's been able to go into the social care teams again and I guess wave the flag from a different aspect… she's definitely bridged that gap of knowledge and awareness [in the local authority] *where we previously failed to get them to understand it and recognise it."* (Direct Worker)

There was also a sense among participants that RPCs had been **successful in some areas in communicating and working with police forces on CCE** despite some of the barriers detailed in previous chapters. Youth offending and social care teams felt that RPCs had played a significant role in a cultural change within some police forces. Stakeholders noted instances of police forces being more willing and able to identify exploited children as victims, rather than solely as perpetrators. There was a sense that RPCs had been able to build relationships with some forces where there had been initial reluctance to engage.

"[The RPC worker] *has been instrumental in working with the* [area] *police, to try to get them to understand that these children aren't criminals, and that they're exploited."* (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

"[The RPC] *has certainly improved my knowledge, they've challenged some of my old school mentalities around how we would have dealt with some of these investigations."* (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

5.3 Outcomes for children

Stakeholders noted that the RPCs' role had a clear positive impact on outcomes for children in several ways, with operational stakeholders drawing on specific examples from their caseloads. **RPCs were seen as a safety net for children in the region**, with many stakeholders feeling that **RPCs had identified gaps in service provision on a strategic level as well as on a case-by-case basis**. Stakeholders felt that more children were identified as needing support than previously and that there were **more examples of multi-service support packages and appropriate use of disruption techniques by the police and modern slavery legislation**. There were also a handful of examples given of children receiving reduced sentencing or dropped charges due to RPC input. Some stakeholders felt that they had seen increased numbers of NRM referrals and positive decisions for children, but there was an acknowledgement that these positive shifts around NRM awareness and outcomes for children were due to a multitude of factors, including a national uplift of CCE and CSE awareness.

Where there were concerns, these were linked to unease around no option for direct contact with the child. Mostly these concerns stemmed from initial adopter site stakeholders – due to teething issues with the model change, such as a perception of lack of communication about the change – but most had subsequently felt that the role was

valuable. However, some ICTG service staff felt that there should be an option for direct work in extenuating circumstances to ensure the best outcome for every child.

5.3.1 Identifying and addressing gaps in services or provision

Collaborative working at an operational level

RPCs were able to **foster multi-agency responses due to their oversight of the movement of children across local authority areas.** Stakeholders mentioned that RPCs were often able to identify where one child was being picked up across different services and local authorities, and so link up agencies to avoid duplication or omission. Due to their networks and presence on key panels, RPCs could remember names, patterns or indicators and highlight children who should be supported and referred to a service – when other professionals may not have noticed. For example, if a child living in one local authority and was arrested or picked up in another, RPCs could act as a conduit of information between relevant local area multi-agency meetings. In some areas, it was felt that RPCs occupied a unique position and ability to bring cases proactively to the attention of different services.

"[The RPC] is starting to be able to draw those distinctions,… at a very operational level…She'll raise it in the meeting and then afterwards, formally, she'll send an email to the chair of both panels…We've had some really positive feedback that nobody else is able to do that because there's nobody else sitting in all of those panels [who is] *able to join that lot together."* (Service Manager)

Greater identification by professionals of child exploitation

Stakeholders felt social care and youth offending teams were **identifying and actioning child exploitation cases, where they would not have done previously.** This was seen to be due to RPCs' wider awareness-raising on child exploitation indicators as well as to their work with individual operational staff. Stakeholders reported that a general lack of proactivity could be an issue when exploring the needs of a child who had been criminally exploited. RPCs would reportedly encourage relevant agencies to 'dig below the surface' – working with professionals:

- requesting information from the police about the adult who is exploiting the child;

- utilising police intelligence; and

- linking with education or social services to highlight historical or current familial issues that indicate links to exploitation.

Stakeholders mentioned examples of children who may not have received the right support if RPCs had not identified the issues – particularly children who did not realise that they were being exploited or who initially refused to engage with services.

"[The RPC] highlights a lot of children who need far more support and they need to be safeguarded. You know, without them there those kids definitely would fall through the net." (Operational stakeholder, youth offending – initial adopter site)

"On a more case-by-case basis [the RPC role] has benefited my team…because we've had much more discussions around trafficking, it's prompted a lot more thought and discussion around that whole process, and when we should be thinking about it. And on a case-by-case basis ultimately led to actioning that more than we would have done before." (Strategic stakeholder, social care – initial adopter site)

Reviewing and quality assuring

Stakeholders from different services also reported that RPCs played an important role by being a 'second pair of eyes', revisiting and reviewing cases to **aid identification of children who needed support.** RPCs were felt to provide a 'safety net' for children who may have been missed by operational staff with heavy workloads. For example, police teams reported that RPCs had helped to review cases and identified where further action was needed. Social workers felt that RPCs had helped to ensure that children were considered for further support and pushed forward support where a child may not have had the best outcome due to capacity within teams.

"The difficulty with our job is we have to chase up a lot of things. [There were examples of cases where we] *actually may not get the best outcome for that young person, because we wouldn't know the right person to contact, and actually it may go over the timescales needed. So,* [the RPC is] *really good at reminding, just sending emails saying, 'Do you need any more help before filling out the NRM for this? It's due back by this date,' and making sure that I've got all the information*." (Operational stakeholder, social care)

For some stakeholders, RPCs having less case management responsibilities than Direct Workers was an important factor behind the RPCs' ability to take a step back and act as quality assurance.

"It's useful to have that very scrutinous [sic] *pair of eyes on what's going on for a young person because I think we can sometimes get blinded by the processes and procedures and miss things and* [the RPC] *is that safety net that makes sure that we don't miss things."* (Operational stakeholder, social care – later adopter site)

However, not all stakeholders felt that the lack of direct work in the RPCs' role was wholly positive. There were concerns among some stakeholders that certain **children could be missed or let down by services due to RPCs being unable to work directly with them**. Service Managers and RPCs felt that they could identify examples where short-term, intensive direct support from an RPC could have improved the outcome for certain children. In particular, they said that children could be at risk of falling through the gaps when local authority services were unable to provide a lead professional due to resourcing issues. There were also concerns that front-line staff may not always identify signs, even after training, if exploitation was particularly hidden or if children were not able to articulate

what was happening to them. Although they felt that direct work should not be a primary part of the role, they felt that having flexibility to work with children in select cases would ensure that the ICTG service could mitigate against the risk of these children not receiving support.

These concerns arose in some initial adopter sites where the transition to the new RPC role had been met with some criticism – particularly amongst stakeholders from local authorities where social care and youth offending services were less developed or specialised to work with children who were exploited. ICTG service stakeholders highlighted that transition to the new model was much more keenly felt in some local authorities where there were higher numbers of children trafficked within the UK in the area or less infrastructure to step in to work directly with children after the shift to the RPCs' role.

"[Some local authorities] had really felt that a direct work model that was previously offered was something that added value to them, and probably were really dissatisfied that we were moving to a model which was much more about advice and guidance. But... we do have some local authorities that are very appreciative of the RPC model because they have established services that are directly engaging the child and are directly engaging the family; and we have other regions where they don't have that provision and they really wish that they could have the direct work model back from us." (Service Manager)

Advocating for children

RPCs provided advocacy for children on a strategic level by working to push child exploitation as a prominent safeguarding issue within their regions. Both operational and strategic stakeholders involved in front-line services highlighted how RPCs regularly **ensured that NRM referrals and child exploitation were raised as agenda items** at multi-agency meetings. This was particularly notable in later adopter regions, where some local authority panels may not have raised child exploitation so regularly or as a separate item to discuss.

Stakeholders felt that RPCs had provided an **influential voice at multi-agency meetings**. RPCs were perceived as independent specialists whose primary focus was to look after the best interests of vulnerable children.

"You have someone in the room here that's got that expert knowledge and brings it to the forefront because...when you're discussing a case, you've got multiple issues to consider. It's good to have someone there who you know that's their primary job role; to have knowledge and be aware of trafficking and exploitation." (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

Social care and youth offending teams felt supported by RPCs at multi-agency meetings, particularly when discussing CCE with police forces. RPCs would **challenge assumptions about CCE**, underline the urgency in cases where NRM referrals needed to

be submitted to a deadline and bring conversations back to the child as a victim of exploitation.

"It's so incredibly valuable, particularly to me, as children's services, who can sometimes feel like a lone voice. In terms of making those sorts of challenges, that [the RPC] *is absolutely on the same page as me in terms of those multi-agency meetings where you're trying to encourage people to see these kids as victims when often they're displaying some really quite dangerous behaviour...* [the RPC] *is really good at advocating for them, and you can see how respected* [they are*]…I think everybody would like them to go to everything if they could."* (Strategic stakeholder, social care)

Improved experience of children during support

It was **also reported that RPCs often improved children's experiences of the support that they received,** by providing guidance to professionals working with them on how to explain trafficking sensitively and clearly to the child. Stakeholders felt that RPCs had helped to ensure that children were more aware of:

- what was happening;

- who was involved in their case;

- who to contact; and

- what exploitation means.

However, this was not the case for all professionals; one operational stakeholder reported that they had not received this type of guidance from the RPC and felt that it would have improved the outcome for the child in that instance. In addition, there were concerns that, due to the lack of direct contact with the RPCs, children may be unaware of who is working on their case 'behind the scenes', which could disempower them.

"The RPCs are doing all this work for a young person but actually they're just a name on a piece of paper and the young person doesn't know that that work is being done around them." (Direct Worker)

5.3.2 National Referral Mechanism referrals

Increased NRM referrals and positive decisions

Stakeholders across all groups generally **felt that they had seen increased numbers of NRM referrals** in their regions since the introduction of the RPCs' role, as well as NRM referrals being submitted by local authorities or teams who had not previously done so.

Although not always seen as entirely linked to the RPCs' role, there was an acknowledgement that the role was a contributing factor to these positive measures.[53]

 "[The RPC has] *been instrumental in our increase in NRM referrals and from that we've got a… significantly higher population or number of young people who would be treated as a victim, than potentially would have been previously."* (Strategic stakeholder, social care)

Earlier NRM referrals for CCE

In addition, RPCs and ICTG service staff felt they were now seeing NRM referrals for CCE being done **more efficiently and at an earlier point following the identification of potential exploitation** by some services across their regions. This was highlighted as a key way of ensuring that services were able to provide more proactive and preventative support to children. As social workers were more likely to work with children at earlier stages, increased NRM referrals from social care teams were seen as a key indicator of success.

"And, as time's gone by….it was mainly youth justice who were telling us and, to some extent, the exploitation has already happened, the person's quite a lot [sic] *way down the line of their exploitation journey and we're starting to see social workers coming in much earlier now. So, we're, kind of, able to provide the support at a point where it prevents anything awful happening to that child."* (RPC)

However, there was also an acknowledgement that there was still some distance to go. The speed of referrals was generally felt to be improving, but there were areas where CCE referrals were **still primarily made by YOTs** at the point where a child had been arrested or charged with offences. This limited the type of support available to RPCs or other agencies as interventions focused on crisis management or reacting to charges.

5.3.3. Improved support packages and positive outcomes

Better support packages for children

The **multi-agency links created by RPCs were seen as important in developing holistic support packages** for children. Stakeholders both within, and outside of, the ICTG service said that RPCs had aided in unifying agencies where responses to child exploitation had previously been siloed. Some said that RPCs held a unique position to trace children throughout their journey and act as a conduit between services to ensure that protocols were put in place for the child, and that they were referred to the right services.

There was evidence that RPCs **advocated the use of relevant legislation or the inclusion of police disruption orders** into support packages and would work with different agencies to ensure that measures were implemented by criminal justice

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[53] This stakeholder view could not be verified by the quantitative data, as NRM referrals have generally increased month-on-month in both ICTG sites and areas outside of ICTG sites.

stakeholders. For example, RPCs would identify cases where police use of disruptive measures (such as slavery and trafficking risk orders for the adults around the children) would aid in preventing re-trafficking. When signs of exploitation had been identified in children who had been served court orders or anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), stakeholders reported that RPCs would link up the relevant youth offending and police teams involved.

Stakeholders reported that RPCs had a positive **impact on more support plans being built on strong evidence bases**. Some stakeholders said that RPCs had led to more examples of agencies considering the context around the child to develop a more nuanced and reactive support plan. This could involve identifying risk factors to re-exploitation – such as outstanding debts to exploiters or gang members, family ties or other open connections (such as digital contact). This was noted as a beneficial shift both by those within and outside of the ICTG service. Stakeholders also felt that a child's parents or legal guardians were sometimes more likely to be linked into discussions if appropriate, which could enable a more holistic response and safety plan.

"Two years ago, one of the main interventions would be to send children away from their family and place them in a new area, but they've learned from recent data that [this] *can actually make the situation riskier for the child… (sometimes it's appropriate and sometimes not). We're definitely seeing outcomes about research being used in people's assessments, the family being included and…being seen as a resource within that planning assessment and support plan as well."* (Service Manager)

However, some stakeholders underlined that the **RPCs' contribution could be one of many** in the regions. Shifts towards more proactive and holistic support plans could be seen as an impact of wider activity. Again, **the lack of option for direct work with children was raised as a potential negative effect** in some instances where children may be missing direct support from services.

Improved outcomes for children during criminal proceedings

RPCs were felt to have improved the outcomes for children affected by CCE in their regions. Operational stakeholders gave some examples of children having a **reduction in sentencing or charges dropped** due in part to the support that they received from the RPC. In cases where court dates meant reasonable and conclusive grounds decisions had to be received very quickly, stakeholders said that RPCs would intervene, move the process along and ensure that the deadlines were reached. Youth offending workers said RPC guidance on language and how to refer to legislation correctly in pre-sentencing reports was a key part of court decisions to give children lighter sentencing in these instances.

"[The NRM referral] *was being pushed as much as possible for that young person leading up to the court date for the best outcome."* (Operational stakeholder, social care)

There were other examples of RPCs providing specialist guidance during court proceedings **to ensure that CCE cases were dealt with in a sensitive way**. For example, if there were suspicions that alleged perpetrators would be attending court hearings, RPCs would link together barristers and YOTs so that circumstances were discussed in court without putting the child at risk.

Better transitions to care at age 18+

There were also some examples given by external stakeholders of RPCs improving the outcomes for young people transitioning out of children services at the age of 18. In these cases, the transition for the child from the lead professional they had been working with to a new lead professional for adult care could be crucial, and there were examples of RPCs smoothing the transition process for young people. RPCs would offer advice on housing and employment plans, for example, whether independent living or supported accommodation would be more appropriate initially.

"I was invited to the right meetings because of [the RPC and] *I was given the right information. I had a three-way introduction and that whole process has just worked so smoothly that it means I'm now supporting this girl and it's really positive... for me that's not something you come across very well, someone being supportive into making sure that a young person is transitioned into another agency. The support, I just can't fault that."* (Operational stakeholder, criminal justice)

Conclusions and lessons learnt

This assessment found that stakeholders overall were generally very positive about the Regional Practice Co-ordinators' (RPCs') role. In particular they felt that youth offending, social service and police teams were more aware about indicators of child trafficking and exploitation and more confident and able to submit National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals. Positive outcomes for children were also highlighted, with examples of more holistic and needs-based support packages and improved multi-agency working.

The findings also indicate information that may be relevant for a future roll-out of the RPC role nationally. These are set out below.

Knowledge, skills and characteristics of individual RPCs: The skills and expertise of the RPCs were seen as pivotal to the success of the role by many stakeholders. RPCs were often held in high regard due to the depth and breadth of their knowledge on child exploitation, and services appreciated their RPC's personability and willingness to help. The most important skill identified was building relationships with different agencies and local authorities – this was seen as crucial to opening doors to achieve other aspects of the RPCs' role (namely supporting other professionals and raising the awareness of both child trafficking and the Independent Child Trafficking Guardian [ICTG] service). Being able to approach agencies sensitively and engage with teams or local authorities that had been initially resistant was seen as a key indicator for success. Recruitment of RPCs should consider the importance of relationship-building skills for those in the role.

Balancing strategic and operational elements of the role: Stakeholders felt the RPCs' role had bolstered the strategic planning capacity of the ICTG service. While Direct Workers had to focus on their high volumes of direct work with children, the flexibility of the RPC role meant that they could use their time to develop strategy plans and identify key partners and gaps within the Service. Yet at the same time, there was evidence that RPCs could sometimes struggle to find the right balance between the strategic component of their role and supporting operational staff. RPCs reported they would often have to de-prioritise awareness-raising or relationship-building plans in order to support professionals on individual cases. This suggests that additional RPCs per region could be considered to ensure that the strategic planning elements of the ICTG service are covered – particularly as the tension between these two elements of the RPCs' role could be exacerbated once the ICTG service was embedded and well-known in a region.

Discretionary case work: Although the RPCs' role was generally seen as having a positive outcome for children, there were concerns that children could be missed or let down by the ICTG service due to RPCs being unable to work directly with them. This was particularly relevant in some areas that did not have the infrastructure or established specialist services to provide effective direct support for trafficked children. Stakeholders felt that they could identify examples where short-term intensive direct support from an RPC could have improved the outcome for a child. Although it was not felt that this should be a core part of the RPCs' role, some called for RPCs to have discretionary capacity to

work directly with children in extenuating circumstances. However, direct support of children could limit the RPCs' ability to deliver the strategic component of their role, which, as mentioned above, can already be a challenge. The RPCs' ability to provide more direct support to individual children should be therefore weighed up against the need to deliver the vital strategic component of their role.

Continued focus on the Modern Slavery Act 2015 Section 45 defence: Stakeholders across all groups were generally very positive about the RPCs' contribution to increasing awareness of child criminal exploitation (CCE) and child sexual exploitation (CSE) but felt that progress had been slower in terms of knowledge of the Section 45 defence. Although RPCs had worked to raise awareness amongst relevant agencies on the Section 45 defence, the complexity of the legislation, as well as misperceptions about the defence held by some criminal justice professionals, had hindered progress. The perceived low level of awareness of CCE amongst the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), magistrates and the judiciary was seen as one of the key barriers faced by youth offending and social care teams when trying to apply the Section 45 defence in practice. Some efforts had been made by RPCs to raise awareness amongst CPS teams and courts, to complement the court professionals' formal training. ICTG service professionals felt that this was an important next step in their awareness-raising plans. For further roll-out, ICTG engagement with the CPS and court professionals will be an important way of raising awareness of the Section 45 defence and embedding best practice.

Maximise reach: Front-line staff mentioned that they had sometimes struggled to take up the RPCs' offers of support or awareness-raising due to their heavy workload. High turnover amongst some local authority teams could also impact on the RPCs' ability to embed best practice and awareness of CCE and CSE across the board. Although it was acknowledged that these external challenges would be difficult to mitigate, there were examples of RPCs developing handout training tools (which could be used regardless of staff turnover) and undertaking 'train the trainer' sessions to encourage 'trickle down' awareness raising. Similar packages or techniques to mitigate the impact of tight resourcing and high turnover could help to embed best practice as part of any future RPC roll-out.

Co-ordinated communication: Some stakeholders in initial adopter sites felt that there had been a lack of co-ordinated communication about the ICTG service's transition to the revised model, which introduced the RPC role. This was mentioned by various stakeholders with no notable focus on certain agencies. Some reported they had heard about the restructure 'by chance' and felt that the reasons for the change had been unclear. As the ICTG service is rolled out, a focus on co-ordinated communication across the relevant services and stakeholders in each local authority could improve awareness of the Service and help to build relationships in the early stages.

Invest time to map out the needs of regions: Where the role worked particularly well, the ICTG team would invest significant time to identify where and how the RPCs' role would benefit each local authority in their region. RPCs reported on the varying needs of services and local authorities, depending on the issues they were facing as well as the

level of awareness and established services already in place to tackle child trafficking. Although many stakeholders felt that the RPCs' role had a positive outcome for professionals, specific teams in some areas felt that there had been limited impact. This was the case where professionals already felt equipped to refer to the NRM and support children who had been trafficked. This illustrates the importance of building in a mapping period and engaging with local authorities at the start of implementation to ensure that the RPCs' role is adapted to the level and type of need in each team within each local authority.

Adapt the model to local contexts: Some early adopter sites were geographically large and had multiple local authorities, services and multi-agency structures, or otherwise had greater levels of need. In these regions, RPCs and ICTG service teams could face challenges in ensuring a blanket coverage. For such regions, the option of more than one RPC could be considered for further roll-out.

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