

Operation Luka – multi-agency response to the exploitation of children and young people

A multi-agency initiative addressing child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE) in Manchester city centre.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Child abuse Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)
Organisation	Greater Manchester Police
HMICFRS report	Inspection of the effectiveness of police and law enforcement bodies' response to group-based child sexual exploitation: A progress report
Contact	Chris Chadderton
Email address	chris.chadderton@gmp.police.uk
Region	North West

Key details

Partners	Police Business and commerce Community safety partnership Health services Local authority
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2024
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

The aim of Operation Luka is to address child sexual and criminal exploitation in Manchester city centre through co-ordinated activity including targeted proactive deployments and raising awareness.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation Luka are to:

- reduce the risk of exploitation – protecting children and young people from harm by identifying and addressing exploitation risks
- improve engagement – building trust and positive relationships between children, young people, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and partner agencies
- improve diversionary support – offering support services to steer children and young people away from harmful situations
- strengthen intelligence gathering – collecting and sharing information on exploitation to support intelligence-led investigations

- improving the disruption of criminal activity and prosecution rate of offenders through enforcement
- increase awareness among business owners – educating businesses on exploitation and reporting using initiatives such as Operation Makesafe

Description

GMP identified a trend in the increased number of concern reports of children and young people in the Piccadilly Garden area of Manchester. As a result, in January 2024 a Management of Risk in Law Enforcement (MoRiLE) scoring assessment was conducted to evaluate vulnerability in this area, which revealed the following:

- Piccadilly Gardens was identified as a hotspot for child sexual exploitation (CSE) and child criminal exploitation (CCE)
- Piccadilly Gardens had high levels of criminal activity
- a large volume of vulnerable children and young people missing from care homes were found by the force in Piccadilly Gardens
- safeguarding Units such as the Complex Safeguarding Hub (CSH) identified that vulnerable children regularly attended Piccadilly Gardens and engaged in harmful behaviours
- several outstanding sex offender management unit offenders were in the city centre and had breached orders to control their offending and behaviours
- GMP had concerns that vulnerable children and young people were interacting with adults in Piccadilly Gardens, who were providing drugs and alcohol and were using this to either exploit them sexually or engage them in criminality

The scoring process involved subject matter experts (SMEs) from the local Neighbourhood Beat Officer (NBO) Team, Operation Vulcan Team and the Complex Safeguarding Team. The Force Intelligence Bureau assisted with the moderation of the score, which was recorded as 696. Since January, there has been intensive police action and partnership work. In September 2024, the score was recalculated and recorded as 209.

Operation Luka

A 4P Plan was implemented to support coordination and activity. The 4P included:

Prepare:

- raise awareness among partners about Operation Luka, including risk understanding and mapping through MoRiLE assessment, and secure commitment to the joint 4P plan
- deliver targeted training to hotels, Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM), and city centre businesses via Operation Makesafe, empowering them to recognise indicators of CCE/CSE and report concerns through clear pathways
- provide training and continued professional development (CPD) for frontline officers to strengthen knowledge of CSE, CCE, and child centred policing, aligned with the vulnerability delivery plan for the City of Manchester
- ensure robust intelligence collection and information sharing from partners, identifying incidents and offences to support threat assessment, with briefings continuously updated
- anticipate key city events, particularly during summer periods, that may increase vulnerability and elevate the risk of child harm linked to CSE and CCE

Prevent:

- encourage referrals through Operation Cura to assist schools in identifying opportunities for early intervention
- refer vulnerable individuals at risk of CCE/CSE to the CSH for timely support from partner services
- conduct enhanced reviews of all child abduction notices (CAPs) related to CSE/CCE in Piccadilly Gardens to ensure every safeguarding opportunity is considered
- work collaboratively with the community safety partnership and local authorities to target-harden known offending areas in Piccadilly Gardens, including improvements to CCTV coverage and removal of visual obstructions

Pursue:

- target known offenders and bring them to justice
- explore civil/ancillary orders for offender management
- proactively arrest outstanding suspects for sex offender registration
- investigate CCE/CSE offences thoroughly and promptly using appropriate resources

Protect:

- share intelligence across districts for coordinated safeguarding

- increase awareness of proactive Piccadilly Gardens operations to identify missing children
- ensure compliance with national referral mechanism for trafficking victims
- complete strategy meetings promptly to safeguard young people and vulnerable adults

A GMP led co-ordination meeting is held every two to three months. The meeting is held on Microsoft Teams and is chaired by a superintendent who has silver responsibility for Operation Luka. The meeting is attended by:

- GMP
- Manchester City Council
- Transport for Greater Manchester
- British Transport Police
- Complex Safeguarding Hub

The agenda of the meetings consist of:

- review of recent deployments
- planning future deployments
- intelligence updates
- partner updates (press office, finance)
- safeguarding and planning

A Bronze Safeguarding Meeting is held monthly and conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams. These meetings bring together key partners to ensure a coordinated approach to safeguarding. The meeting is attended by:

- Greater Manchester Complex Safeguarding Teams (all 10 districts)
- Operation Vulcan - GMP's proactive team, who were deployed within the City Centre
- Manchester City Centre Neighbourhood Team
- British Transport Police (BTP)
- Health Services (safeguarding and vulnerability representatives)
- Greater Manchester Complex Safeguarding Teams (all 10 districts)
- Operation Vulcan – GMP's proactive team, who were deployed within the City Centre
- Manchester City Centre Neighbourhood Team
- BTP

- Health Services (safeguarding and vulnerability representatives)
- Children's Services (local authority representatives)

During the pre-deployment meeting:

- A slide pack is prepared in advance, detailing victims and perpetrators who are allocated a lead responsible officer, acting as the point of contact for any required actions. Every individual discussed under Operation Luka is documented in a secure database. Their details can be archived when concerns are mitigated or removed and unarchived if new information or risks emerge.
- Any archived details are reported back at the following meeting with documented reasoning, ensuring transparency and group awareness.

Representatives from across Greater Manchester are invited to attend and may join monthly deployments. The deployments occur at peak times (weekends and evening hours).

After a deployment, debrief forms are completed and intelligence is shared with the relevant teams and partners.

Evaluation

Operation Luka underwent an evaluation conducted by GMP. The evaluation looked at:

- risk reviews carried out every six months using MoRiLE scoring to assess vulnerability and threat levels
- debriefs from deployments are used to evaluate effectiveness, identify improvements, and share learning across agencies

The evaluation found:

- risk reduction – the threat level position reduced from two to 42 in Greater Manchester
- safeguarding impact – 281 children protected through safeguarding referrals

Disruption and enforcement:

- 361 serious and organised crime disruptions recorded
- 37 arrests made
- 10 suspects charged

- one conviction for robbery secured

Overall impact

Operation Luka has been referenced in a publication of the His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) National Child Protection Inspection for its effective work with partners to reduce the risk and harm caused by exploitation.

- Manchester Children's Social Care was recognised as Outstanding in their inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) in 2025, with the Complex Safeguarding Hub praised as 'exemplary'.
- Positive news stories have been shared, with the operation appearing in local and national press reporting.
- Through Manchester's community safety partnership, data from the operation has contributed to the case for improved crime reduction measures in hotspot areas of the city centre.

Learning

- Operation Luka has encouraged stronger relationships to be built with partners in the Hub and across Manchester.
- The risk assessments around partners safety during deployments were tested and found to be robust and fit for purpose.
- The intelligence collection plan has been shared widely and promoted with front-line teams frequently to maximise intelligence gathering.
- Approximately 120 children and 150 investigations have been linked to Operation Luka. This has caused some challenges in the force with balancing business as usual working with deployments. It is essential to co-ordinate and plan ahead to ensure that there are regular deployments.

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