



Warwickshire Safeguarding Strategy for Adolescents

2026-2029

Executive summary



Introduction

The Warwickshire Safeguarding Strategy for Adolescents 2026-2029 sets out a comprehensive three-year, multi-agency plan to prevent, identify, disrupt, and respond to extra-familial harm affecting children and young people in Warwickshire. It recognises adolescence as a critical developmental period and acknowledges the increasing complexity and intensity of risks that occur beyond the family home in peer groups, communities, schools, and online spaces. Understanding and responding to harm posed within these settings, which is often outside of the control of parents and families, is known as Contextual Safeguarding and requires a different response.

For this strategy, Warwickshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (WSCP) has adopted the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF definition of an adolescent which relates to children aged 10 - 19 years.

We will work with young adults beyond this parameter, such as those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and care leavers, and will focus on transitional safeguarding for young adults up to the age of 25. Our strategy and work programme therefore include explicit commitment to improving our offer to this age group and preventing vulnerable young adults from harm and exploitation.

This strategy outlines how Warwickshire Partners will work together to build safer environments, strengthen families and communities, and ensure every young person feels heard, safe, healthy, skilled and happy and can access the right support, from the right person, at the right time. It replaces the 2020-2023 Exploitation Strategy and reflects new learning, system changes, youth voice, and local data.

As adolescents gain independence, the environments they spend time in play an increasingly important role in shaping their safety and wellbeing. Many of the risks they face occur outside the family home and cannot be addressed by families alone. The Warwickshire Safeguarding Adolescent Strategy 2026-2029 reflects the voices and lived experiences of young people across our county, who have told us that they want to feel safer in their communities, to have trusted adults to turn to, and to know where to get help without fear or stigma. Their insight has been an integral part of this strategy.

We recognise that extra-familial harm, including exploitation, serious youth violence, online harm, radicalisation, trafficking, substance misuse and peer-on-peer abuse, presents complex and evolving challenges. This strategy strengthens how we identify these harms, how we intervene early, how

we disrupt those who cause harm, and how we protect and support the young people affected. It also places a strong emphasis on contextual safeguarding, working not only with families but also with the places, spaces and social settings where harm occurs.

Our aim is to build a Warwickshire where:

- Young people are protected in the environments they spend time in, not just within the home
- Early help is accessible, reducing the need for crisis intervention
- Partnership working is strong and seamless, with clear roles and shared accountability
- Communities are empowered to play an active role in safeguarding
- Trauma-informed, strengths-based practice is embedded across all agencies
- Young people's voices drive decision-making at both individual and strategic levels

This strategy brings together local authority services, education, police, health, voluntary and community partners in a united approach. It outlines how we will measure progress and continually learn from local intelligence, professional expertise, research, and most importantly the experiences of children and families.

We extend our thanks to every young person, parent, carer, practitioner and partner who has contributed to the development of this strategy. Safeguarding adolescents is a shared responsibility, and together we will continue working to make Warwickshire a place where all young people feel safe and can thrive.

Our vision

‘Empower adolescents to feel safe, heard, and supported, building resilience through early intervention, and strengthening partnerships across services and communities to provide effective safeguarding at the right time.’



Warwickshire context

Understanding the context in which children and young people live their lives is an essential feature of effective multi-agency intervention. Our collective data identifies local challenges and the priorities to be addressed through the strategy.

In Warwickshire, in 2024/25:

Approximately

11.6%

of Warwickshire's population are adolescents aged **10-19 years**



51/49%

split between **proportion of female and male adolescents** respectively



50%

of **sexual offence** victims are adolescents

20%

of **victims of violence** are adolescents

46%

of referrals to **Family Connect** are for adolescents



3.9%

relate to concern of harm **outside the home**

Adolescents suspected of **committing crime:**

67%

violent crime

18%

sexual offences

67%

18%

Adolescent **victims of crime**

71%

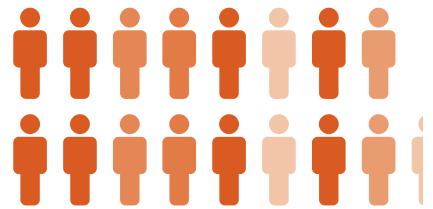
violent crime offences

22%

for sexual offences

16.4%

of adolescents are from **black, Asian, and other ethnic groups**



18%

of **violent crime suspects** are adolescents

34%

of **sexual offence suspects** are adolescents



0.4%

of adolescents were **not in or attending education, training, or employment (NEET)**

7% (187)

of **victims of crimes** committed outside the home in Warwickshire are adolescents



52%
male

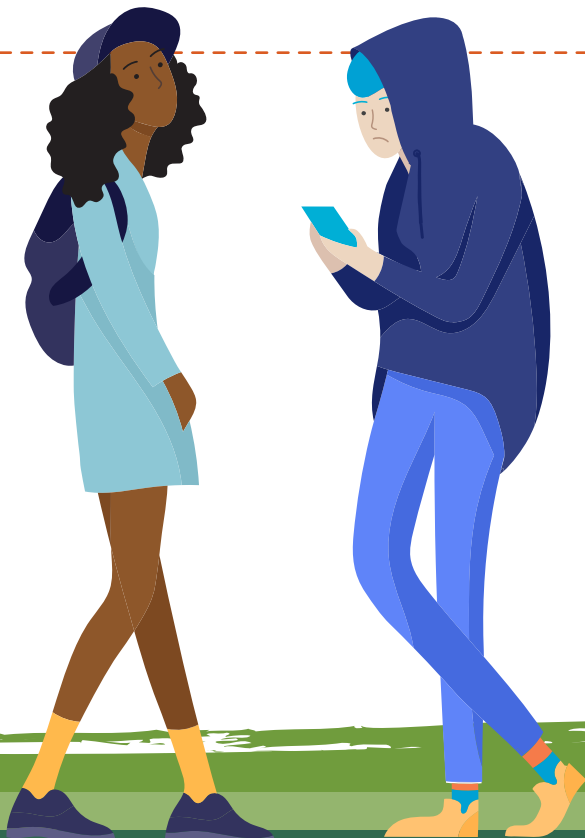
48%
female

7% (187)

of **Families First Assessments** have concerns for adolescents **exposed to harm outside the home**

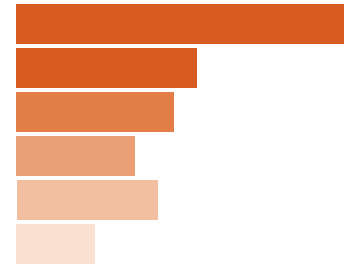


71% were identified as **being vulnerable to harm**



Identified concerns

for adolescents at risk or suffering **harm outside the home:**



58%
CCE

32%
CSE

28%
peer violence

21%
gang activity

25%
online grooming

14%
trafficking or modern slavery

19.8%

of those suspected of offences committed **outside the home** are adolescents



70%
male

30%
female

Our priorities

We will achieve our vision by working collaboratively with partners to deliver on the following priorities over the next three years:

Prioritise prevention and early intervention

We will strengthen the resilience of children and young people by ensuring timely access to appropriate support and early help. This preventative approach aims to address emerging vulnerabilities at the earliest opportunity, reducing the risk of escalation into extra-familial harm and enable children and young people to achieve positive outcomes and thrive.

Embed a contextual safeguarding approach across the partnership

Contextual safeguarding is central to our safeguarding approach. We will address the settings in which extra-familial harm occurs, with the objective of fostering safer spaces for children and young people across our county.

Provide effective protection and deliver the right level of support at the right time

We will develop and deliver targeted, evidence-informed support services for children and young people affected by extra-familial harm. These interventions will reduce exposure to ongoing risk, support recovery, and enable them to rebuild their lives with stability and resilience.

Enhance the multi-agency approach to identification and disruption of those who pose a risk to children and young people

We will continue to establish and strengthen a robust multi-agency approach that utilises local intelligence to proactively identify individuals and groups who pose a risk to children and young people, and to coordinate effective disruption of harmful activity.

Our principles

Our principles guide our actions and decisions across the Safeguarding Children Partnership and workforce to protect young people from extra familial harm. These are aligned to the [Warwickshire Spectrum of Support](#), guiding responses to emerging concerns.

Understand adolescence -

adolescence is a distinct developmental stage with specific needs and influences, and we aim to understand young people by recognising how the risks they take shape their growing independence.

Work collaboratively to ensure the best outcomes for adolescents - risks and protective factors for adolescents exist within families, peers, and communities, so strong multi agency partnerships are essential to effectively address extra familial harm and keep young people safe.

See adolescents as children first -

We will treat young people as children above all else, recognising extra familial harm as a safeguarding concern. Our approach avoids blame and recognises the constrained choices adolescents face, rather than expecting adult decision making or responses.

Respect the voice, experience and expertise of children and young people - we will ensure they have the ability, power and opportunity to influence the support

and safety planning they need, and to shape services that we put in place in Warwickshire enabling them to feel listened to and involved in decisions that affect them.

Focus on strengths, utilising a trauma informed and relational approach - we will recognise the emotional needs beneath young people's behaviours, prioritising safety, trust, collaboration, choice and empowerment, and focusing on their strengths and protective factors rather than the problems they face.

Value diversity and challenge inequalities, discrimination and disproportionality - we will value Warwickshire's diverse range of adolescents, promote inclusive and anti-discriminatory practice that challenges bias and ensures equal opportunity, and address disproportionality among those affected by extrafamilial harm.

Work collaboratively with families and treat parents and carers as partners, whenever safe to do so - we will take a joined up, family centred approach that values families' strengths, engages parents and carers in understanding and managing risks outside the home, builds safeguarding capacity and resilience, and involves them in safety planning whenever safe to do so.

Understanding adolescence

Adolescence is a word used to describe the process of developing from a child to an adult beginning at the ages 10-12 years and ending at the age of 18 when UK adult status is gained.

Adolescence is a time of huge change, not just in how teenagers look, but in how they feel and act. Neurological remodelling within this developmental stage means decision-making, impulse control, and understanding consequences are still developing while emotional and reward systems are highly active. These neurological changes help explain adolescents' increased vulnerability to risks, stronger emotions, and greater impulse driven behaviour, as well as their capacity for rapid learning and growth. Professionals must understand adolescent development, avoid expecting adult level responses, and challenge adultification - which is when young people are expected to act and make decisions as if they were an adult - to ensure fair, effective safeguarding. Research has shown that black young men and women are more likely to experience adultification bias within child protection and safeguarding.

It is vital that practitioners recognise and respond to other factors that can significantly impact on adolescence and an increased risk of harm. Further information about these aspects can be found in the [full strategy](#). Professionals must recognise the signs and build trusting relationships that help identify these vulnerabilities, adopting a trauma informed approach where necessary.



Prevalence of extra familial harm in Warwickshire

During adolescence the nature of the risks faced by young people, and the way that they experience these risks, often differs from earlier childhood – as do their needs. Specifically, young people may be faced with a new set of complex risks – ones not posed by families, but instead by peers, partners and adults unconnected to their families. These risks:

- Often manifest in extra-familial environments including schools, public spaces and online platforms
 - Are informed by peer norms and relationships
 - Involve young people perpetrating, as well as experiencing harm
 - Can present as the result of perceived 'choices' a young person has made or continues to make despite professional or parental intervention
 - Often feature grooming, coercion, criminality, and serious risks of significant sexual and physical harm that creates a climate of fear and reduces engagement with services
 - Are often beyond the control of parents and rarely instigated by parents
- Can lead to family breakdown and disrupt child and parent relationships following a rapid escalation in risk and disengagement from education
 - Can continue into adulthood, particularly for young people during the 18-25 transitional period

Adolescents in Warwickshire are experiencing increasingly complex and interconnected harms, including:

- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), including county lines involvement
- Missing episodes from home, education and care which often linked to exploitation, coercion or instability
- Online harms, including grooming, image-sharing, and algorithm-driven exposure to harmful content
- Modern slavery and trafficking, with referrals rising significantly year-on-year
- Serious youth violence, including weapons use and peer-on-peer harm
- Radicalisation and Extremism, including emerging misogynistic online movements targeting boys

These risks are often beyond the control of parents, hidden from professionals, reinforced by peer dynamics, and rooted in trauma, coercion, and constrained choices.

Risk factors

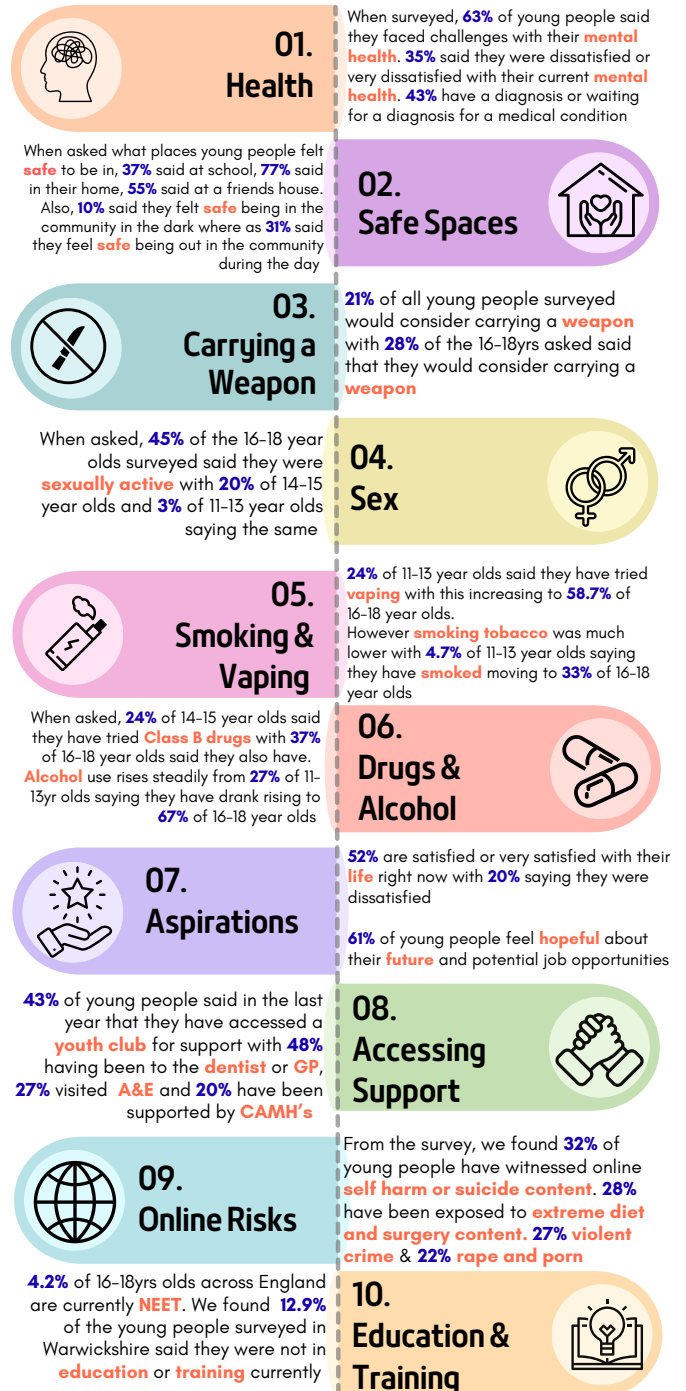
Several risk factors heightening vulnerability to adolescents being harmed have been identified. These include:

- Educational neglect
- Healthcare neglect
- Poor mental health and wellbeing
- Substance misuse and Vaping
- Separated Children (Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children)
- Homelessness
- Children in Care and Care Leavers
- Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND)
- Socio-economic deprivation

What young people have told us

During May 2025 Warwickshire Youth Service conducted a survey with 307 young people in a variety of professional contexts - at open access youth clubs, within targeted one to one youth work sessions, specific groups and with young people in school settings. The top findings of the survey are presented opposite.

YOUTH SERVICE SURVEY 2025 TOP 10 SURVEY FINDINGS



Survey of 307 young people aged 11-18 who attend a youth club or receive support from a Warwickshire Youth Worker (May 2025)

Transitional safeguarding

An approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages. It focuses on safeguarding young people from adolescence into adulthood but also recognises key changes in a young person's life, understanding transition is a journey not an event, and every young person will experience this journey differently.

Effective transitional safeguarding requires agencies to work beyond traditional child and adult boundaries, prioritising preventative support and flexible responses for young adults who may still need safeguarding. In Warwickshire, the Family and Adolescent Support Team (FAST) links children's and adults' services to provide joined up support before and after age 18, building trusted relationships early, coordinating with agencies such as adult safeguarding, housing, mental health and substance misuse, and helping young adults avoid crisis. We aim to develop clear pathways for over 18s to access safeguarding and broader support that promotes safe, healthy and independent lives.

We want young people to be supported through all key transitional stages, including developmental, educational, identity related and care related change, and for safeguarding responses to reflect their diverse needs. Warwickshire's safeguarding partners will continue working together to evaluate services, address gaps, and strengthen transitions for young people.

What we seek to achieve

- Young people supported with transition challenges such as housing, finances, independent living, and access to education, training or employment
- Agencies working together to provide structural support at key transition stages, with goals shaped in partnership with young people
- Continued programmes that keep young people safe, build understanding of harmful behaviours, and develop coping skills and awareness of choices
- Access to support for physical and mental health, substance misuse, isolation, and negative peer or family influences
- Support that builds on young people's strengths and enhances their social, personal and community networks



Multi-agency offer

We will strengthen the resilience of children and young people by ensuring timely access to appropriate support and early help. This preventative approach aims to address emerging vulnerabilities at the earliest opportunity, reducing the risk of escalation into extra-familial harm and enabling children and young people to achieve positive outcomes and thrive.

We offer a range of services across the Spectrum of Support through our partnership to meet the varying needs of children and young people, including a diverse and well-established voluntary and community sector provision. Some of these services are highlighted here:

Specialist services	• Multi-Agency Child Protection Team • Children in care and leaving care • Family Adolescent Support Team (FAST) • Trafficking and exploitation team - Police	• Youth Justice Service • Harmful Sexual Behaviour Service • Specialist commissioned services • Voluntary and community sector • Specialist Education Provision
Family Help	• Children with Disabilities Team • Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services • Family Connect • SENDAR	• Additional resourced provisions and units in mainstream schools • Warwickshire Youth Service • Police -PCSO's and Safer Neighbourhood Teams • Voluntary and community sector
Early Support Services	• Early Support Officers • Police -PCSO's and Safer Neighbourhood Teams • Cyber Choices • Health - RISE/Substance Misuse Services	• Warwickshire Youth Service • Mental health and pastoral support teams in schools • Voluntary and community sector
Universal services	• Early years settings, schools and colleges • Open access universal youth offer including leisure services • GPs, health visitors and school nurses	• Community Help Points (safe places for children and young people) • Voluntary and community sector

Delivering on our priorities

Prioritising prevention and early intervention

Ensuring young people receive the right intervention at the right time is vital. Support should not depend on harm escalating, and we aim to build resilience so children and young people can thrive within their families and communities. Early help will be offered as soon as possible to prevent vulnerabilities from developing into harm, and clear communication with young people and families will ensure they can access information, advice and support when they need it.

A preventative approach requires all sectors to recognise signs and early indicators of risk, identify when young people are placed in harmful situations, and share information effectively. The WCSP training on harm outside the home, along with the extended learning hub for education settings, helps ensure partners have strong, shared knowledge of issues affecting adolescent safeguarding.

To achieve this, we will strengthen young people's resilience through school-based education, expand outreach youth work, and work with community and faith partners on early prevention. We will improve access to clear information, deliver a coordinated multi-agency response to harm outside the home, and grow our Contextual Safeguarding Champions network. We will further embed locality-based Family Help Hubs, enhance data sharing to support

safer communities, promote inclusive school practices, broaden positive youth opportunities, and expand targeted substance misuse support.

Embedding a contextual safeguarding approach

Warwickshire is embedding a contextual safeguarding approach to better protect young people from harm occurring outside the home by strengthening multi-agency assessments, responses and data sharing. New holistic assessment processes, Locality Contextual Safeguarding Meetings (LCSMs) and an operational oversight group help identify and reduce risks in peer groups and community settings, supported by a countywide network of Champions and updated threshold guidance. Ongoing priorities include improving how contextual risks are recorded, strengthening community partnerships and ensuring young people's voices shape safer places and spaces.

To achieve this, we will review our current approach, broaden engagement with local services and community organisations, and improve how we record and use information about extra-familial contexts. We will strengthen context-based assessments, work more closely with peer groups, support safe community spaces, and embed contextual safeguarding principles into the planning and design of public environments.

Provide effective protection and deliver the right level of support at the right time

Partners aim to ensure that anyone working with adolescents can recognise vulnerability early, respond appropriately, and provide the right support at the right time. Young people affected by extra-familial harm such as exploitation or serious violence, need targeted, timely intervention to reduce risk and prevent long term negative impacts on their wellbeing, development, and future opportunities.

Warwickshire's Family and Adolescent Support Teams (FAST) play a central role in delivering this support. Launched in 2023, FAST provides trauma informed, multi-disciplinary, and flexible help for adolescents facing complex risks outside the home. Working closely with police, Barnardo's, Youth Justice, and other partners, FAST uses contextual safeguarding, restorative practice, and community-based approaches to keep young people safe, strengthen family relationships, and reduce repeated harm, including through Return Conversations with missing children. Additional commissioned services such as therapeutic support, advocacy, and social prescribing further help young people recover, build resilience, and develop their personal and educational potential.

We recognise practitioners need to continue to develop their knowledge and skills and be aware of new and emerging threats and keep up to date with learning from local and national reviews and national research, as well as expertise from the lived experience of young people and families. We seek to proactively address concepts of 'unconscious bias' and 'adultification' and our approach to protection and support will include a focus on 'reachable moments' caused by significant changes in circumstances that can escalate risk rapidly, such as exclusion from school, to ensure the right support is provided when it is needed. We adopt a child first approach, recognising their needs, vulnerabilities, past trauma and constrained choices where exploitation is a factor, and prioritising prevention and diversion to reduce unnecessary criminalisation.

To achieve this, we will align our commissioned services to effectively support adolescents affected by harm outside the home, equip practitioners with the knowledge and skills required, and promote a child first and trauma sensitive approach across the partnership. We will develop improved pathways for young people transitioning to adulthood to access relevant support, safeguarding and protection from harm, ensuring they continue to receive the right support to stay safe and thrive.

Enhance the multi-agency approach to identification and disruption of those who pose a risk to children and young people

The partnership aims to strengthen a proactive multi agency approach that uses local intelligence to identify individuals and locations posing risks to children and young people, taking decisive action to disrupt harmful activity. While prevention and support for families remain priorities, learning from national reviews highlights the importance of robust disruption measures as part of safeguarding responses. Understanding the nature and patterns of extra familial harm across Warwickshire is essential to effectively target, prevent, and challenge offending behaviour.

Contextual Safeguarding Meetings (CSMs) and Locality Contextual Safeguarding Meetings (LCSMs) bring together key partners to share intelligence, develop disruption plans, and manage concerns linked to specific people and places. We seek to build and maintain strong relationships with local services, businesses, and community organisations giving us a fuller picture of risks affecting young people. We will act against people and unsafe locations causing concern, prioritising disruption by using both criminal and civil powers such as those related to licensing, health and safety, fraud, and housing to intervene against perpetrators and unsafe locations.

Success relies on trust between agencies, communities, and young people, encouraging the reporting of harm and supporting safer neighbourhoods. To achieve this, we will enhance cross border information sharing to develop a comprehensive local profile of extra-familial harm, make use of the full range of disruption tools and tactics, and empower communities to speak up about violence and crime, ensuring perpetrators are identified quickly and appropriate enforcement action is taken.



Governance and measuring progress

The WSCP is responsible for overseeing the delivery, monitoring and review of this strategy. The progress of the strategy will be reviewed annually by the Adolescent Safeguarding Partnership Group who share responsibility for meeting agreed objectives. Using an outcome-based accountability approach, we will monitor performance, identify issues, and use data to inform decisions and drive solutions.

Our governance framework outlines how partners work together to deliver the Safeguarding Strategy for Adolescents. Work to address extra familial harm spans several partnership boards and subgroups, and the framework clarifies how these efforts connect, reducing duplication and limiting multiple meetings on similar issues.

The strategy will be updated where necessary to respond to local and national changes, including updates to statutory guidance and best practice initiatives.

Performance management and the measurement of success is crucial to ensuring continuous improvement, and the development of a robust performance management framework will ensure a co-ordinated approach across partners to track progress of the strategy implementation and develop an effective response to safeguarding adolescents.

The framework will include indicators relating to the profile of extra-familial harm, risk factors, and the number of children and young people accessing our prevention and early intervention services.

These indicators will be grouped into three areas: prevention, disruption, and system so it is clear what our aims are and who is responsible.



Conclusion

The strategy does not simply describe what needs to happen, it establishes a clear framework for how partners will work together and how success will be measured. Its power lies in the shared commitment across agencies, the voices of young people, and the evidence that a trauma informed, relational and collaborative approach leads to better outcomes.

Above all, this strategy is a promise to our young people. It is our commitment to stand beside them, to hear them, and to act when they tell us what they need. By working together with families, communities, and partners, we will build a Warwickshire where adolescents feel safe, valued, and supported. Every child and young person deserves the chance to grow with confidence and hope and through this shared effort, we will help make that a reality.



