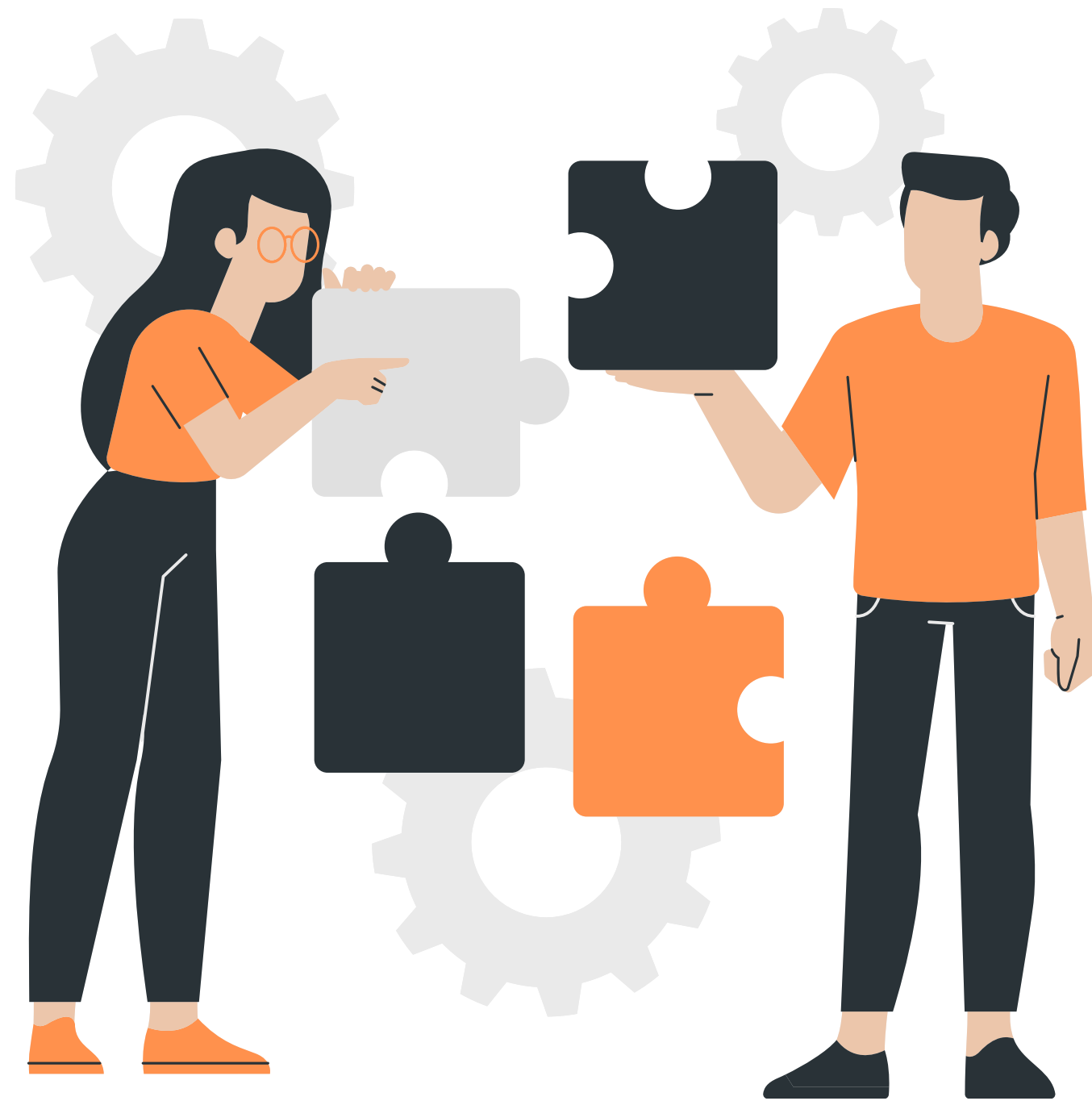


Sexualised Behaviours in Children Strategy – Responding to Harmful Sexual Behaviours, 2024 to 2027.



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The strategy focuses on definition, prevention, early intervention, and ensuring a consistent and effective response across North Yorkshire. This joint approach ensures that our efforts are coordinated that we are working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people.



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Foreword

This strategy represents a significant milestone in our collective efforts to address Harmful Sexual Behaviour among children and young people within North Yorkshire. It is built upon the strong foundations of our [Being Young in North Yorkshire Strategy](#). It reflects our dedication to creating a safe and supportive environment for every child and young person. It illustrates how we work in partnership with each other, underpinned by our [Strength in Relationships Practice Model](#) and legislation such as [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) and our developing practice in our trauma-informed way of working.

We know that Harmful Sexual Behaviour can have a lasting impact on individuals and communities. Therefore, it is our responsibility to ensure that we have robust measures in place to prevent such behaviours, provide appropriate interventions, and work together to effectively support those affected.

This Strategy has been developed in collaboration with a wide range of partners, following an audit undertaken by the NSPCC and its findings, which was funded through the Community Fund provided by the Office of Police Fire and Crime Commissioner.

It outlines our comprehensive approach and commitment to understanding and tackling all forms of sexualised behaviour in children, ranging from developmentally typical behaviours to those behaviours that are harmful.

We know that for many children and young people, their lives include both online and offline experiences, with their digital and physical lives often appearing as one. This has been considered as part of the Strategy with research telling us that around one-third of child sexual abuse is carried out by under-18s, and online harm is a growing problem as young people's use of technology has increased. (Lucy Faithfull foundation)

The strategy focuses on definition, prevention, early intervention, and ensuring a consistent and effective response across North Yorkshire. This joint approach ensures that our efforts are coordinated that we are working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people, and that we continue to build on this in future phases.

Overview of the Strategy

The Sexualised Behaviours in Children Strategy is underpinned by the NYSCP's Being Young in North Yorkshire Strategy and echoes the central themes of supporting children and young people in our community to be Safe, Happy, Healthy, and Achieving.

The Strategy will support professionals to recognise and respond to all types of sexualised behaviours in children and young people and support the understanding that these behaviours are part of a continuum from developmentally typical, through to harmful.

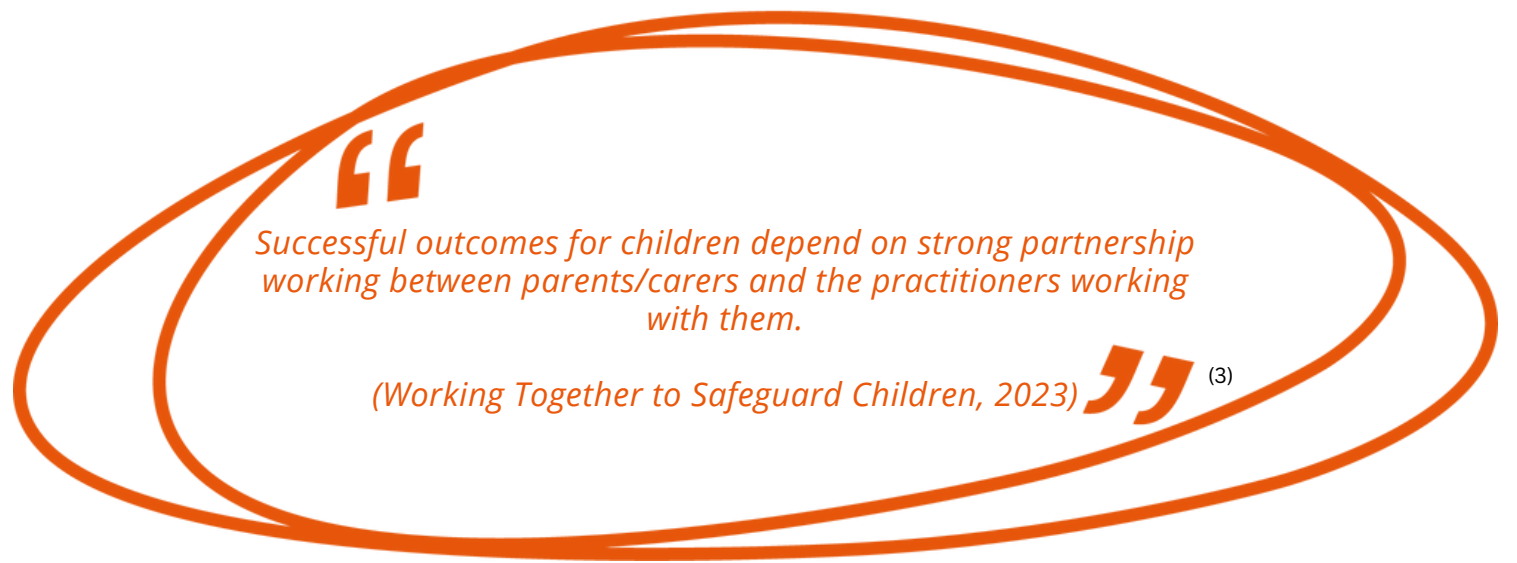
Most children will display developmentally typical behaviours throughout their childhood, however, some children, for a variety of reasons, may display either problematic or harmful behaviours during this time.

Harmful Sexual Behaviours is an overarching term which Hackett et al (2016) describe as *“sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, that may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult”*.⁽¹⁾ The term ‘Harmful Sexual Behaviour’ does not refer to all sexual behaviours shown by children, the Hackett continuum places these behaviours in the context of what is typically expected for a child’s age and developmental stage.



Research suggests that around a third of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by other children and young people. Harmful sexual behaviour is most commonly identified in adolescent boys, but girls and younger children can also display HSB.
(NSPCC, 2024)⁽²⁾

Working Together to Safeguarding Children legislation identifies the importance of and need for strong partnership working and shared responsibility when addressing Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB). This involves adopting a whole family and network approach. By collaborating with partners and engaging families, we can ensure a comprehensive and effective response to understanding Harmful Sexual Behaviours, and promoting the safety and well-being of all children involved.



QR Codes



NYSCP Homepage



Early Help Landing Page NYES

1. Hackett, S., Holmes, D., & Branigan, P. (2016). Harmful sexual behaviour framework: An evidence-informed operational framework for children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours (p. 15). London: NSPCC.

2. NSPCC. (2024). Statistics briefing: Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB).

3. Department for Education. (2023). Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (p. 12).

Strategy Aims

The priorities drawn directly from the NSPCC audit process across NYSCP partners, show that there needs to be a greater understanding of what Harmful Sexual Behaviour is and that this is viewed on a continuum of behaviours and in the context of what is developmentally appropriate.

The strategy aims to make clear the approach to supporting children, their families, and professionals in understanding sexualised behaviours and appropriate and supportive responses. For there to be a county-wide view on the scale of harmful sexual behaviour, to better inform training and workforce development, and understand the drivers and trends behind it.

As part of the approach, there is an NYSCP Toolkit to enable practitioners and parents to be able to recognise all forms of sexualised behaviours in children. The Toolkit contains links to scenarios and relevant responses, training, and other helpful resources.

Trauma-informed principles are embedded into partnership working alongside our practice model and this feeds into the strategy and takes into consideration the principles of the trauma-informed way of working inclusive of all children's needs and understanding. This practice recognises the impact of trauma and integrates this understanding into care, and aims to create a safe, supportive environment for recovery.

It is important to acknowledge and emphasise that this strategy relates specifically to children up to the age of 18, and that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) need to be considered in light of this and up to the age of 25, ensuring a safe and seamless transition for those vulnerable young people requiring continuing support to adult support services.



Harmful Sexual Behaviours and Related Concerns

It is recognised that balancing a child's online and offline life is essential for their development and well-being. This strategy has been written with this in mind and considers how this can affect the understanding of Harmful Sexual Behaviour for children, young people, and their carers. It is important to acknowledge that irrespective of whether concerns are virtual /online or in person, both experiences are of equal impact and severity.

[Ofsted's Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges \(2021\)](#) tells us that children and young people have reported unwanted touching, sexual assault, and being sent explicit images or videos of things they did not want to see, happen "a lot, or sometimes" to them or their peers. This suggests that these behaviours are perceived as normal. Rapid changes in technology, and the difficulties with being able to stay adequately informed of them add to the weight of concerns for many families and professionals.

The Sexualised Behaviours in Children Strategy – Responding to Harmful Sexual Behaviours, is to be considered alongside the [NYSCP MACE and Contextual Safeguarding Strategy](#), and in keeping with this takes a holistic and 'whole system' approach to vulnerability and contextual safeguarding, viewing the child's life, experiences, and vulnerabilities as a complete picture to improve their long-term outcomes.

The NYSCP Sexualised Behaviours in Children Strategy puts a focus on understanding, education, and prevention, with trusted relationships being the "golden thread" to this, as well as the consideration that "Safeguarding is everybody's responsibility."

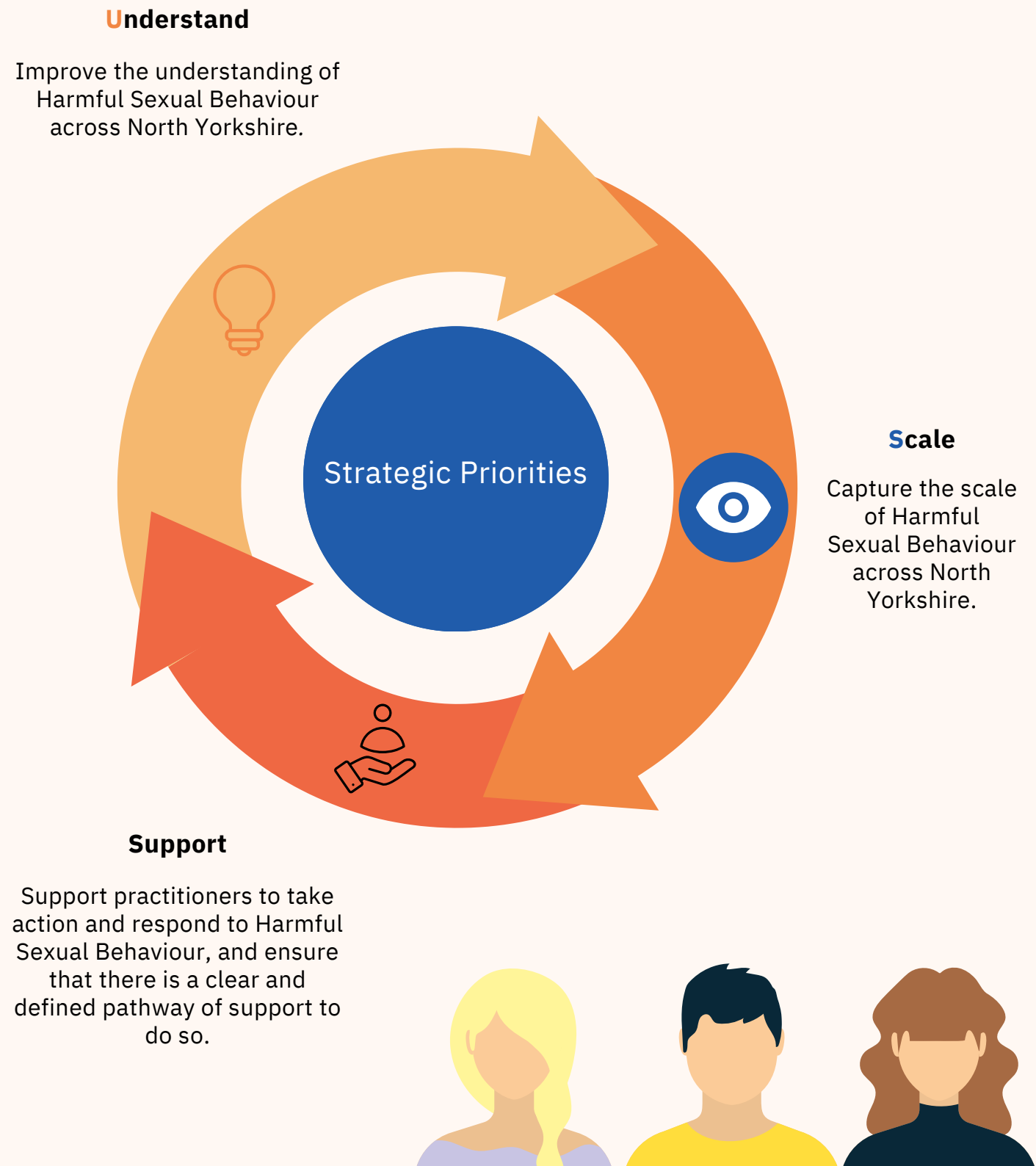


To fulfil our identified aims, we have set out three clear priorities - **U.S.S.**, the "Us" model

Understand - **S**cale – **S**upport.

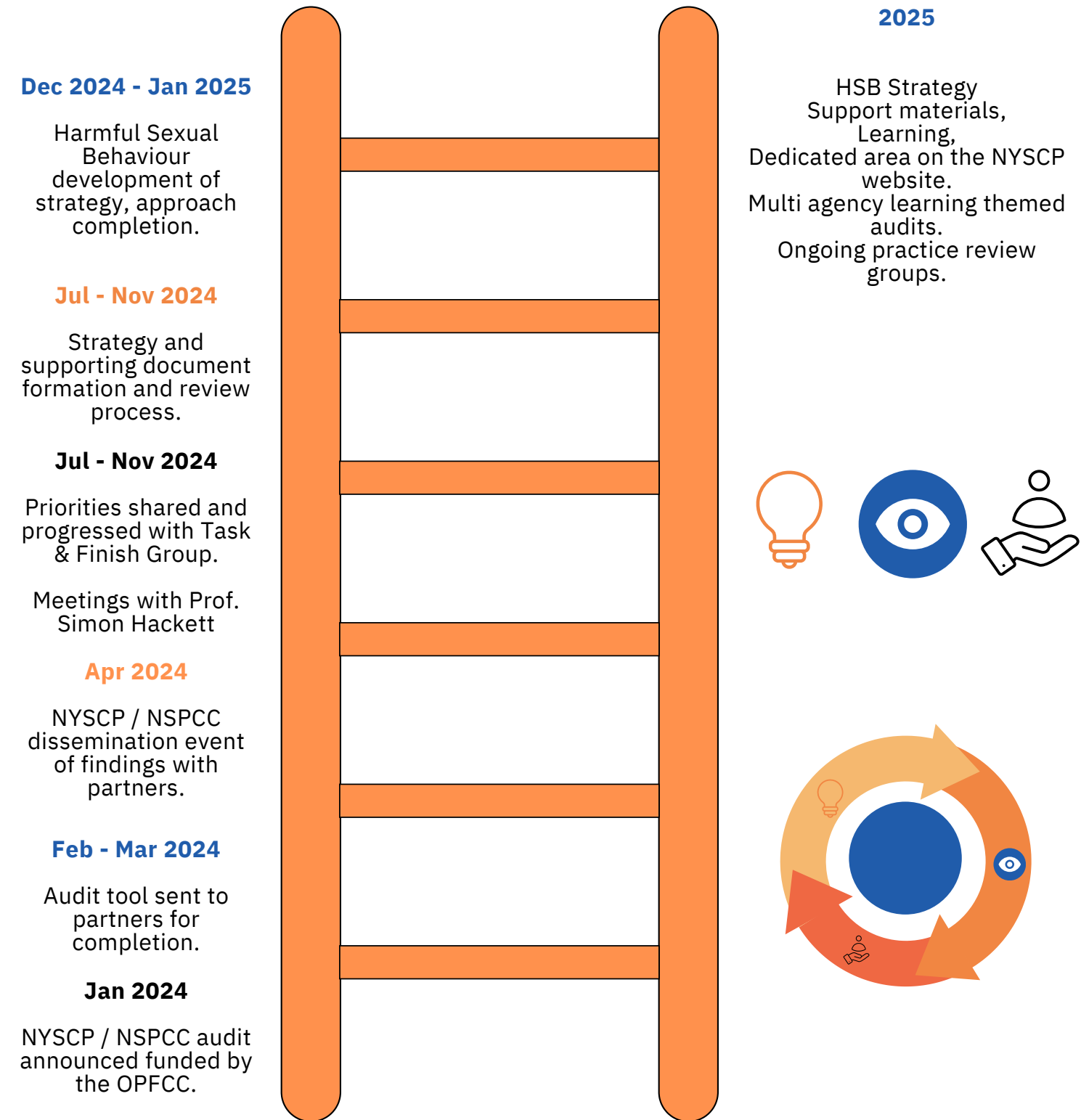
Strategic Priorities

The three identified priorities across our partnership - **Understand** - **Scale** – **Support** are underpinned by a detailed action plan that holds partner agencies to account for their plans.



The Journey so far.....

Below shows the steps taken in understanding how children, young people, families, and practitioners are supported in understanding, preventing and responding to sexualised behaviours.



Understand - Scale – Support.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour - Plan on a Page

Understand

Improve the understanding of Harmful Sexual Behaviour across North Yorkshire.

Pledge

Increase the shared understanding of what HSB is and continue to improve practitioners/workforce working knowledge of how to appropriately respond to it.

Adopt a culture of non-judgement and appropriate language, and a consistent, collaborative approach to better understand behaviours and their causes.

Identify harmful behaviours in their own context.

Outcome

Practitioners increased confidence in identifying what Harmful Sexual Behaviour is, what may be considered sexual, but developmentally appropriate, and the context in which this can occur. Partners understand that Harmful Sexual Behaviour is on a continuum.

An understanding of the link between family and contextual factors that may contribute to a child or young person's behaviour, and that sexualised behaviours in children and young people can be an expression of other worries or underlying vulnerabilities.

A consistent language to describe Harmful Sexual Behaviour with recognition of the importance of not blaming the children involved. An increased knowledge of the complexities and culture of the online world.

Scale

Capture the scale of Harmful Sexual Behaviour across North Yorkshire

Pledge

Ensure that there is a multiagency data collection plan in place to identify the scale of reported sexual behaviours and behaviour that is deemed harmful in North Yorkshire.

Understand where and how data on Harmful Sexual Behaviour is collected and recorded proportionately, to help build on the knowledge, extent, and context of Harmful Sexual Behaviour in North Yorkshire, and to be aware of themes and trends to aid support and preventative work.

Outcome

Data capture provides a continual clear picture of the scale and the nature of Harmful Sexual Behaviour across North Yorkshire to easily identify patterns of concern county-wide, locally and in the online space.

Continued cross-partnership working to better understand the changing picture of Harmful Sexual Behaviours.

Data is monitored and utilised to provide response and support and ensure training can be relevant, up to date and reviewed by each partner, education, and voluntary group.

To continuously understand what partners are doing - taking a strengths-based approach.

Support

Support practitioners to act and respond to Harmful Sexual Behaviour and ensure that there is a clear and defined pathway of how to do so

Pledge

Adopt a continuum of support and interventions to meet needs from early identification to specialist support.

Commit to a whole partnership and wider community approach to the prevention of Harmful Sexual Behaviour. Educate partners and carers to understand appropriate behaviours in the context of child development and children's age, stage and understanding, both on and offline.

Reinforce messages of healthy relationships and consent as the central strand of the prevention of unsafe sexual behaviours.

Outcome

Practitioners who are confident in supporting both sexualised and harmful sexual behaviours and are aware of the defined pathway of support to do so. Professionals understand and can provide interventions to meet needs, from prevention to early identification and specialist support.

A whole partnership and wider community approach embedded for the prevention of all forms of Harmful Sexual Behaviour. Parents and carers are helped to understand appropriate behaviours in the context of child development and children's age, stage and understanding, and where to get help. Messages of healthy relationships, autonomy, and consent are understood and reinforced by carers and professionals at all stages of childhood.

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