

Exploitation - Transitions Key Audit Findings 2026

In January 2026, a review of multi-agency practice in identifying and responding to exploitation risks for nine young people (14–25) transitioning to adulthood.

Headline Findings

- All audits were graded Requires Improvement at a multi-agency level
- Exploitation risks not consistently identified, recorded or understood
- Late referrals and weak transition planning limit prevention
- Risk management unclear or absent, making impact difficult to evidence.



What worked Well

- Examples of effective multi-agency collaboration improving outcomes
- Timely Care Act assessments by Bridge to Adulthood
- Positive impact of Strengths-based practice and advocacy

Key Findings

Identifying Exploitation

- Concerns often not explicitly named
- No use of screening tools (CERAF/Adult tool) in audited cases

→ Embed consistent use of tools and shared definitions

Professional Curiosity

- Inconsistent, particularly in adult services

→ Strengthen curiosity around vulnerability and exploitation indicators

Language & Practice

- Inconsistent trauma-informed and strengths-based language

→ Improve professional language and training

Transition Planning

- Referrals often too late (Near age 18)

→ Start planning earlier (from age 14) with joint working

Preparing for Adulthood

- Young people are not being adequately supported to develop their independence/life skills (e.g. housing, finance)
- Evidence of debt and instability at 18

→ Improve how we are supporting children and young people earlier and gradually building independence and support systems before reaching adulthood

Risk Management

- Risks not clearly recorded or planned for

→ Develop clear, proactive and reviewed risk plans

Multi-Agency Working

- Inconsistent information sharing, limited shared chronologies)

→ Strengthen collaboration and systems to support improved multi-agency working

Housing

- Lack of suitable accommodation (“cliff edge” at 18)

→ System-wide improvement needed for care-experienced adults

Service Gaps

- No clear pathways for neurodivergent young people below thresholds

→ Explore opportunities for commissioned support and clearer pathways and improve understanding and access to what resources already exist

Conclusion

Young people are **not being consistently prepared for adulthood**, increasing exploitation risk. Key issues include late planning, weak risk identification, inconsistent multi-agency working, and gaps in housing and services.

Primary Actions

- Embed exploitation screening tools
- Start transition planning earlier (14+)
- Strengthen risk identification and management
- Improve multi-agency information sharing
- Develop housing and support pathways

