



Closing the Gap - exploring need and resource on ROTH pathways (Part One):

Report Author: Lauren Wroe

October 2025

Durham University

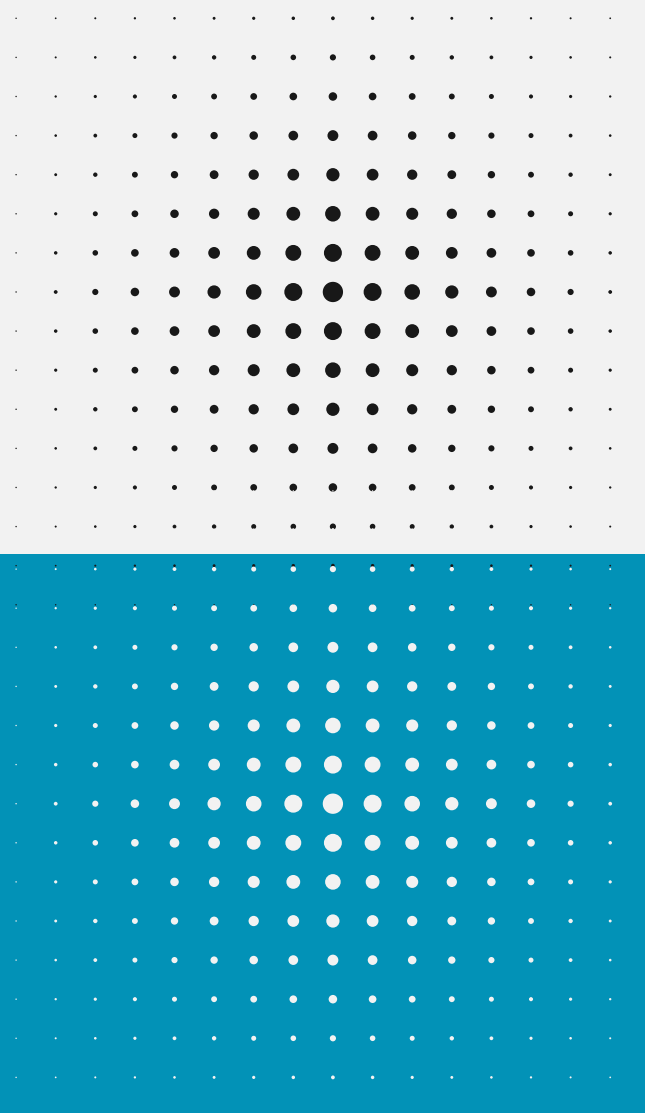


TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Background	3
2. Closing the gap: a research study	5
• What are the needs of young people on ROTH pathways	7
• What services, support and provision are available to young people on ROTH pathways?	11
• How does ROTH pathway support planning meet young people's needs?	14
3. Case studies from local areas	19
4. Conclusion	27
5. Recommendations and next steps	30

1. Background



1.1 Risk Outside the Home Pathways

This research project has been carried out by the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding (GCCS). It is part of the Planning for Safety research study^[1] exploring and supporting the implementation of the Risk Outside The Home (ROTH) pathway. The ROTH is a new statutory child-protection 'pathway' for children and young people who are experiencing or are at risk of significant harm in contexts beyond their families. When children experience significant harm beyond their families the statutory pathway to plan and monitor their care (child protection) is one that has traditionally focused on supporting parents and the family home. This new pathway has been piloted to see if a statutory process that specifically focuses on harm outside of the home can support parents and young people to work together with child protection professionals to improve safety in their peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods, rather than child protection professionals monitoring parenting or young people's behaviour, both of which often have little bearing on their experiences of abuse beyond their families.

Since 2019 the Contextual Safeguarding team has worked with children's social care departments to design, test, and document the development of the ROTH child protection pathway. ROTH Pathways are intended to offer a structure, and through their implementation contribute to a culture, in which it is possible to offer child protection responses when young people are at risk of significant extra-familial harm.

The Contextual Safeguarding team has tracked the development of ROTH child protection pathways since 2019. Phase 1 focused on three options for alternative pathways, of which ROTH, developed in one site, showed most promise. Phase 2 scaled ROTH pathways into an additional three sites and focused on identifying shared features, opportunities, and challenges. Phase 3 maintained piloting across all four sites, with a specific focus on the content of plans and their impact on contexts, as well as the ability of traditional child protection pathways and broader elements of children's services provision to adopt ROTH principles. This phase of the work evidenced key features of effective implementation, and surfaced policy challenges that require strategic attention. Over this period, national interest in ROTH pathways has grown, and there is now significant demand for support amongst areas beyond the four pilot sites.

[1] <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/our-work/research/research-projects/planning-for-safety/>



1.2 The National Support Programme

In response, in 2025 the Contextual Safeguarding team launched a National Support Programme. The National Support Programme will:

- Address key operational and strategic challenges faced by pilot sites to sustain and improve achievements to date
- Extend support beyond pilot sites to ensure all areas who wish to establish a ROTH pathway do so based on the latest available evidence
- Track demand for ROTH pathways, and national implications of said demand, particularly in respect of statutory guidance and wider policy levers

It will achieve this by:

- Developing a range of practice resource packages to meet practice and policy needs identified in the three pilot phases
- Establishing a peer-support and learning network for ROTH chairs
- Supporting two learning groups for strategic leads responsible for ROTH pathways – one for areas with a pathway established and one for areas who are in early stages of development
- Undertaking new data collection activities with members of the two learning groups, to fill knowledge gaps that remain after three pilot phases
- Running a series of online learning events and in-person regional events

The Principal Investigator for the National Support Programme is Carlene Firmin. All members of the Contextual Safeguarding team are contributing to resources, research activities and events. The Planning for Safety National Support Programme is funded by the Youth Endowment Fund and Maria Marina Foundation.

2. Closing the Gap - Research Study

2.1 Why this research?

The GCCS now hosts a Community of Practice for local authorities who are setting up or running ROTH pathways. At the time of writing there were 33 local authorities engaged in the ROTH Community of Practice. This research project has engaged with that Community of Practice to continue to explore the benefits of the ROTH pathway, with a specific focus on the ability of the pathway to facilitate plans that meet young people's needs.

Previous research carried out by the Contextual Safeguarding team has identified a mismatch between young people's needs (as identified by young people themselves, their families and the professionals who support them) and the services, support and provision in place to support them[2]. Our research into the use of out-of-area placements identified that when young people cannot be made safer locally, significant resource is spent on relocating them to areas miles away from home[3]. Phase 3 of the ROTH pathway pilots evidenced the potential of ROTH pathways to facilitate effective plans, but also surfaced many barriers, including limited availability, and use of, resources to target contextual factors. Closing the Gap aims to explore this issue in more depth, and to understand the barriers and opportunities the ROTH pathways present for ensuring responses and planning meet young people's needs.

Previous research carried out by the Contextual Safeguarding team has identified a mismatch between young people's needs (as identified by young people themselves, their families and the professionals who support them) and the services, support and provision in place to support them . Our research into the use of out-of-area placements identified that when young people cannot be made safer locally, significant resource is spent on relocating them to areas miles away from home . Phase 3 of the ROTH pathway pilots evidenced the potential of ROTH pathways to facilitate effective plans, but also surfaced many barriers, including limited availability, and use of, resources to target contextual factors. Closing the Gap aims to explore this issue in more depth, and to understand the barriers and opportunities the ROTH pathways present for ensuring responses and planning meet young people's needs.

[2] <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/resources/toolkit-overview/building-safety-safeguarding-black-young-men-and-boys-in-lambeth/>

[3] <https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article/54/8/3658/7701428>



2.2 What we asked

The Closing the Gap research study aimed to explore the ability of ROTH pathways, assessments and plans to support professionals to effectively meet the needs of young people on ROTH pathways. The project asked the following questions:

1. What are the needs of young people on ROTH pathways?
2. What services, support and provision are available to young people on ROTH pathways?
3. In what ways does the ROTH pathway support planning that meets the needs of young people on ROTH pathways?

2.3 What we did

Data was collected from three local authorities who have established ROTH pathways in their local area. This is part one of the research study and a further three local authorities will be recruited in 2026 who are currently setting up ROTH pathways. The local authorities for stage one of the research reported here were recruited via the ROTH Established Sites Community of Practice and represent geographical and rural/ urban/ coastal spread.

We carried out one focus group in each local area with a total of 32 professionals involved with the ROTH pathway. We also reviewed two redacted ROTH assessments and two redacted ROTH plans from each local area. The focus-group data and documents were thematically analysed against the three research questions.

2.4 What we found

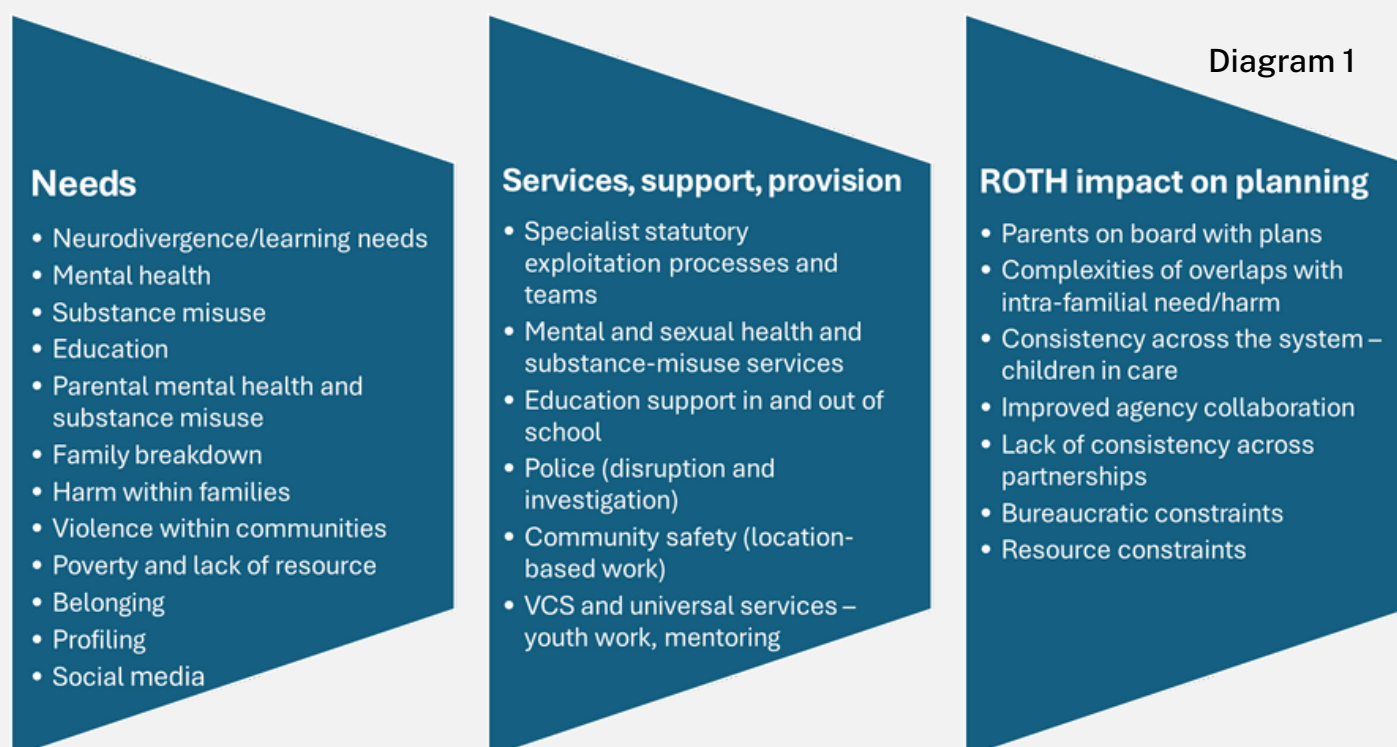
This section will present our learning in relation to the three research questions from the focus groups, and then the review of assessments and plans, before discussing the implications of these findings and recommendations for 'closing the gap' between need and resource for young people on ROTH pathways.

2.4.1 Focus groups

The focus groups were attended by professionals who worked with young people on the ROTH pathway or were responsible for places connected to these young people. Across the three local authorities this included: specialist social workers from Contextual Safeguarding or adolescent safeguarding teams, police safeguarding officers, youth workers from within the local authority and from voluntary sector organisations, health workers, education workers, youth justice workers and community safety officers. The partnerships were similar across the three areas.

The themes from across the focus groups are summarised in diagram one and in more detail discussed below. There were many shared themes and contributions across the three local areas, any areas of divergence are noted.

Diagram 1



1. What are the needs of young people on ROTH pathways?

The ROTH pathways were largely supporting young people in relation to sexual or criminal exploitation. Several ‘needs’ were shared that could be understood as risk indicators of the exploitation (i.e. carrying weapons or going missing) rather than as needs the young people were presenting with. The needs identified could broadly be categorised as ‘young people’s needs’, including neurodivergence, mental health, substance misuse and education. ‘Parental and family needs’ including parental mental health and substance misuse, family breakdown and violence within families. And finally, wider ‘community needs’, including violence in the community, belonging, poverty and lack of resources, profiling of young people and the impacts of social media.

Young people’s needs

Undiagnosed and diagnosed learning needs were identified across the dataset. Two local areas referenced data they had collected on special educational needs or neurodivergence and extra-familial harm. One local area noted over 50% of young people in their risk outside the home cohort having special educational needs with more of these young people being yet undiagnosed. Another local area noted two thirds of their cohort had an ADHD or ASD diagnosis with the other third with some suspected neurodivergence. Undiagnosed and diagnosed learning needs and neurodivergence were identified as “a very prominent factor” across the areas. Related to this were concerns about unmet need due to backlogs with diagnoses and Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP). The prevalence of speech and language difficulties was noted and again delays or barriers in accessing speech and language therapy services.



Education was identified as a major need across the dataset, with all sites noting that many young people on ROTH pathways are not in education or facing barriers to accessing education:

I would say a lot of our young people have issues surrounding their education, whether they're at risk of or have experienced fixed-term and permanent exclusion, and we do have some that are home-educated.

(Professionals Focus Group)

The **mental health** of young people on ROTH pathways was identified as a major need. These mental health needs included trauma, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem and were both related to the experience of exploitation and preceded it. In addition to the mental health need, waiting lists for support, or the nature of the support offer (i.e. 1:1, office-based) were flagged as barriers to young people's mental health needs being met:

One of our exploited young people was on the CAMHS [child and adolescent mental health service] waiting list for four years. He was criminally exploited, exposed to violence, taking drugs, almost died a number of times. He got a diagnosis and medicated, and his behaviour completely changed.

(Professionals Focus Group)

Drug misuse for young people experiencing a range of extra-familial harm (not just child criminal exploitation (CCE)) was noted, although it was specifically noted as a need for young people on ROTH pathways due to CCE. Drugs including cannabis, nitrous oxide, alcohol, ketamine, cocaine were mentioned, and drug misuse was sometimes (but not always) associated with intent to supply.

Drugs misuse is a common one, especially for the boys, which is how they get into the exploitation world, as well, cos of their drug habit.

(Professionals Focus Group)



Parental and family needs

The prevalence of intra-familial need or harm for young people on ROTH pathways was identified across the focus groups. For some local areas this presented complications with allocating young people to either traditional child protection or ROTH pathways; this is discussed further below. **Family breakdown and parental separation** were identified across the focus groups, sometimes preceding young people's experiences of extra-familial harm and sometimes resulting from the stress and trauma of experiencing significant harm in the community. This included strain on familial relationships, through to **violence from young people to parents or siblings**. This was described as having an impact on young people's identity and sense of belonging, as they become isolated from their families emotionally and physically.

These familial needs included **parental mental health and substance misuse** which were linked to generational cycles of mental health and substance misuse needs. In some cases, generational cycles of criminalised activity and unemployment were identified and linked to young people's experiences of extra-familial harm. One local area explained:

Years ago, in terms of the steel industry and the opportunities now, when a lot of the dads and the granddads have lost a lot of the jobs within the steel industry. I still see that playing through, and that had quite a significant impact upon parents and grandparents and their mental health and their substance misuse. Particularly, like, alcohol misuse at that time, but also drug misuse, and I think that, generationally, then, that has had an impact on the children that are now our children.

(Professionals Focus Group)

Community needs

Connected to this, is the impact of community resources on families and young people on ROTH pathways. Lack of belonging within families was identified as a need alongside a lack of **belonging** amongst peer groups, which professionals identified as a draw to other vulnerable young people who may already be experiencing some form of extra-familial harm. The impact of **social media** on young people on ROTH pathways was noted, with the proliferation of social media connecting young people to a wider range of peers, impacting social skills and increasing their exposure to harm/violence:

Ten years ago, we didn't have social media that could, like, you know, thrash something out so quickly. Like, you've got kids now who don't just know the kids that go to their school, they know the kids that go to school in the next town along and-and beyond, and-and they all call themselves "friends" or "peers," because they know someone off someone and someone else.'

(Professionals Focus Group)



It was noted that young people on ROTH pathways and their peers may have **witnessed violence** at home, but also in the wider community and this was a need that again both preceded and resulted from experiences of extra-familial harm.

Limited community resources and community-level poverty were identified as a “big issue” for young people on ROTH pathways, with professionals across the focus groups noting a lack of things to do with their days as a major need for young people on ROTH pathways. This was a particular issue for the (many) young people who were not in full-time education:

There's limited resources for them to use, or to access, and so some of them are involved in, whether it's cannabis or other substances, or they may have friends who take those things, and they quite -it's limited in what additional activities they can, you know, take part in, within xxx. They may need to travel. You know, you speak to them and they'll say they need to travel to other areas, cos there's, there's not that much available.

(Professional Focus Group)

If they don't like school, or if they're not engaging in school, and they're under sixteen, it's very, very limited in what's available for them.'

(Professional Focus Group)

We need to fill up their days. But we can't when there's nothing to fill it up with

(Professionals Focus Group)

This was also an issue for parents who are trying to support their children but have access to very few services in the community or facing significant barriers to accessing these services due to language and literacy barriers. This was noted as having an impact on parental mental health and family stability, with consequences for young people's support networks and safety:

Other factors that come up for parents is them knowing where else they can go to, for support, outside of, you know, the [statutory service] and the work that's being done within there. But what else is available within the community that they can actually go and access for themselves?

They are culturally diverse, you know.

(Professionals Focus Group)

'There's a couple of mothers, they just weren't able to... they don't read, they can't read, they're not literate, and so they're not able to do some of the things that they need to do, to, kind of, keep their children safe.

(Professionals Focus Group)



Profiling of young people was identified as a need for young people on ROTH pathways, this included professionals describing young people as feeling they are being targeted by services in ways that others aren't because of their background, friendships circles and racial and religious identities:

Some boys think that they're being targeted, maybe because they come from a particular group, and then I think the same person that Kirsty was mentioning before, he was saying that he feels that he's being profiled, because of the groups of people that he's hanging round with, and so he's targeted, as well.

(Professionals Focus Group)

Sometimes I've heard young men who may look like, whatever a typical Muslim might look like, they think that they're being targeted. I've also heard young people feeling that, if they're mixing with other young black men, of Caribbean or African origin, they feel that they might be targeted

(Professionals Focus Group)

2. What services, support and provision are available to young people on ROTH pathways?

When professionals were asked about the services, support and provision available to young people on ROTH pathways they largely described multi-agency processes and services in the statutory and voluntary sector.

Statutory processes and services

Statutory processes included specialist exploitation hubs, teams and panels, the National Referral Mechanism and specialist advocates like Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTG). Statutory services included edge of care workers and parenting support such as Non-violent Resistance (NVR) training to support parents with young people's behaviour. Specialist missing-from-home teams were reported as frequently engaged and some use of local children's homes. One area shared that they engaged the fire service for young people on ROTH pathways where fire setting was a risk.

Health services were commonly engaged, although delays and barriers to access as mentioned previously were noted. This included Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and forensic CAMHS, Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) teams, school nurses, and rape crisis centres, alongside other universal services like sexual health and substance misuse services.



School and education-based support were reported as common for young people on ROTH pathways, linked to the high levels of education barriers for these young people. This included one-to-one work to support young people in and back into school, staff training on issues related to extra-familial harm, group work with young people in relation to extra-familial harm, and school-based awareness sessions including vaping, domestic abuse and substance misuse in primary school curriculum. Young people on ROTH pathways are also offered support from the Virtual School service and provided with support around accessing or being frequently missing from education.

Police and community safety teams

Specialist police units including safeguarding, disruption and investigation teams were engaged in the support plans for young people on ROTH pathways. School police officers, custody support from within the local authority and Police Community Support Officers were also engaged to work in specific areas where young people on ROTH pathways were identified as at risk. In one area this level of police engagement was noted as a defining feature of the ROTH pathways with one professional noting “The difference with ROTH to CP [child protection] is that we try and assess if there's anything the police can do in terms of the safeguarding input.” The role of the police in support plans was described by professionals as varied - from engagement work with young people to disruption, including arrests of young people as a route to safeguarding:

So, yeah, it's the engagement visits, and then all the disruption work. So, disruptions could be, one of them arresting our kids. Unfortunately, it sometimes does come to that, if we've exhausted all means, but an arrest sometimes is the way to safeguard a child, so I have been part of that, and then that allowed us into their mobile phone to then try and work out who the exploiter was. So, yeah, being part of the police isn't always the 'pink and fluffy' side of the safeguarding world, but it is about disrupting these young people and the term, 'making them too hot to handle'
(Professionals Focus Group)

Community safety teams were engaged across the dataset as a means of targeting locations that were identified as at-risk areas for young people on ROTH pathways. This included surveying public spaces, maintenance of parks and other public spaces, installing CCTV, etc.:

...Address any identified environmental factors. So, for example, if a young person's...if one of the places identified is the local park, we might look at whether or not we need to change the hours of when the park's locked, or is there a particular area where the street lighting's not particularly great. Look at lighting. We've got access to rapid-deployment cameras. Do we need to put a camera up? We've done that before, when it was a young person on a plan, and she was hanging around the local park. Are the shrubs overgrown, do they need cutting back? So, we do have access to other council departments
(Professionals Focus Group)



Voluntary and community sector services

Professionals also reported referring out to a range of voluntary and community sector services. This included mentoring services for young people, activities and services run by local sports clubs, voluntary sector substance misuse and mental health services and rape crisis, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) services and harmful sexual behaviour services. There were also a range of voluntary sector youth exploitation services that professionals working on the ROTH pathway reported referring young people to. However, it was noted in one local area that there are barriers for young people on ROTH pathways to accessing universal services.

We have a really strong universal youth service, granted a lot of our young people on ROTH probably won't access them
(Professionals Focus Group)

Across the dataset professionals reported that the services, support and provision mobilised by the ROTH pathway resembled that which would be put in place on a traditional child protection pathway. However, all local areas reported improved relationships with parents that supported the implementation of plans. The role of ROTH pathways in supporting planning that met young people's needs is discussed further in the next section.

Whether it means a different plan, I don't necessarily think so
(Professionals Focus Group)

It's not much different in the plan, per se, but it makes a huge difference for a lot of the parents
(Professionals Focus Group)



3. In what ways does the ROTH pathway support planning that meets the needs of young people on ROTH pathways?

Partnerships with parents and young people

All local areas reported that the ROTH pathway took the pressure away from parents (as reported in previous ROTH pilots[4]), which helped to move plans forward. This was attributed to the partnership approach with parents on the ROTH pathway, where the responsibility for managing risk/ harm sits with the wider professional network and not solely with parents and parenting.

The parents have always been very supportive, and wanting to, you know, work with the plan that's put in place, and I think that's because it seems there probably is a lot more of a bigger professional network around them
(Professionals Focus Group)

You often would get a family really anti-professional or anti-authority at the beginning of the process, yet, because they're brought on as partners, then that does build relationships and it does allow the young people to see their family as influential adults in their life
(Professionals Focus Group)

One barrier to this reported by local areas was the use of child protection or neglect markers on case management systems, so whilst parents were told the focus of the ROTH was not parenting capacity, these traditional markers indicate otherwise on families' professional records. Professionals also raised the issue of how police intelligence can be shared with the professional network when parents and young people are present and reported this as a barrier to planning.

It was also reported that despite the intention of ROTH to work with young people as partners, sometimes young people do not want to engage with the process, or with the services they are allocated. This was often attributed to the (lack of) relationships that young people have with professionals across services, the adult-oriented way in which many services are delivered and the unreasonable expectations that puts on young people. Again, this was presented as something that the ROTH pathway itself does not address as the issue sits outside of the pathway in the wider system.

[4] <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/our-work/research/research-projects/planning-for-safety/>



As soon as we're working with adolescents or teenagers, and they vote with their feet in terms of who they want to see and who they want to engage with, so even if you get them an appointment somewhere, it can be really tricky to get them to engage with that

(Professionals Focus Group)

These young people don't want to go and sit in a therapist waiting room, but, actually, so it's kind of about upskilling and training people in the existing network to try and deliver some of that, you know, like CBT interventions, and stuff like that

(Professionals Focus Group)

An additional barrier to planning on ROTH pathways reported by professionals is that young people's experiences of extra-familial harm were reported to frequently overlap with intra-familial difficulties or harms. This resulted in low numbers of young people on ROTH pathways across the three sites (thresholds for the ROTH pathway were generally reported as high), which meant that young people who didn't meet the threshold for ROTH support due to intra-familial risks were receiving less oversight despite facing significant extra-familial challenges:

Given all the complicated factors within our authority: deprivation, the family, all of the historical stuff, is it's very-very few...it would have young person where the risk is solely outside of the home

(Professional Focus Group)

I don't know if maybe work needs to be done there in terms of the criteria, and should there be a bit more leniency if there is some harm within the home, because I think there's maybe just some missed opportunities in the increased oversight and the increased work with our exploited young people

(Professional Focus Group)

Connected to this, professionals shared that the ROTH pathway currently does not support planning for children in care. Nationally, an increased number of adolescents are entering the care system due to risk outside of the home[5]. A barrier was reported in how ROTH planning, with its increased oversight and partnership working, could be utilised to support planning and risk mitigation for children who were already in care placements.

[5]Rick Hood, Allie Goldacre, Ed Jones, Emma Martin, Keith Clements, Calum Webb, Intervention Pathways following a Social Work Assessment: An Analysis of National Administrative Data for Children's Social Care in England, The British Journal of Social Work, Volume 54, Issue 7, October 2024, Pages 2937–2956, [Body](#).



Collaboration between agencies

Overall, professionals reported that the ROTH pathway facilitates better collaboration between agencies and greater oversight of young people (i.e. more reviews/ meetings than a traditional child protection pathway), which meant that things move more quickly for young people. Professionals also shared that the child protection statutory underpinning of the pathway facilitates better information-sharing between professionals and the specific focus on harm outside of the home helps to focus the partnership work:

That it was so specific, about, about the concerns that really helped the school, when they were thinking about doing their own Safety Plan in school, and their own risk assessments. The fact that this ROTH panel is so clear and explicit, in what the concerns are
(Professional Focus Group)

Professionals did, however, also report difficulties in getting professionals to attend ROTH meetings, sharing that some professionals don't understand the ROTH pathway and their role in it (although there were mixed views on this). One implication of this is that young people are not responded to consistently across the partnership (i.e. viewed as victims in some spaces and perpetrators in others). In these instances, it was felt that more buy-in to the ROTH pathway could improve partnership working:

So, permanently excluding a young person, obviously, there might have been a really dangerous situation and that can't be avoided, but then that increases a risk into the community and the access to the community, so I just feel, sometimes it can be a little bit of a disjointed process, just purely because we just haven't got capacity to get everyone who needs to be around the table around the table
(Professional Focus Group)

I am thinking of one young person who did turn eighteen and he did go on to continue in the community with lots of exploitation, but, then, immediately he's now seen as the perpetrator, rather than the young person
(Professional Focus Group)



An example was provided in one focus group of the implications of disjointed working across the partnership and its impact on planning for young people:

I was at a meeting yesterday with housing, and they were, sort of, saying, well, this property, you know, we're looking to seek to possession this family because there's no concerns. It's all that family, and I was, like, do you realise it's contextual safeguarding conference on this child, and they were like we know nothing about it. Now we know emails have been sent to relevant people, and they were quite shocked
(Professionals Focus Group)

Professionals also reported barriers to working differently, which again could be attributed to a lack of understanding about the aims of the ROTH pathway or the needs of young people on those pathways, but also bureaucratic barriers to working in new ways. This included working with new partners, but also re-thinking statutory processes to best support the relational needs of young people:

There's still a bit of red tape around risk outside the home. One example is we're thinking about moving it a step further in our Community Guardians. We'd suggested that to one other professional was, young person was going missing, turning up at a local takeaway, and we'd said about, sort of, having a conversation ... ringing the police to, ultimately, get him a taxi home, and we said, "You know, can you have a conversation with the takeaway to, then, ring dad to go and pick him up," which dad was agreeable to. And that professional's manager had said, "No, you can't do that."
(Professionals Focus Group)

I've had social workers this week and last week saying, "I really don't want to let them go. I've got such a good relationship with them." So, I think that sometimes, we're still the paperwork, the processes - no, we can't do that because we've never done that. Well, why not? And we need to be a little bit braver sometimes in thinking, like, well, why can't we just do that? And try that, and just see what works?
(Professionals Focus Group)



Whilst the ROTH pathway was seen overall to support multi-agency partnership working through greater collaboration and coordination it was noted that this could also be overwhelming for young people:

In terms of the ROTH pathway, I think that...one of the things that I'm finding is that we know that these young people who are experiencing exploitation, they're very overwhelmed, and that brings about a robust review, which brings about a robust amount of professionals, which then creates more stress sometimes

(Professional Focus Group)

Resource

Resource was identified as a major barrier to the ROTH pathway supporting plans that met young people's needs. Resource within professional services (including short-term project funding) and around young people and their families and communities was barrier that the ROTH pathway was not addressing. This included the impact of resource constraints on services identified as essential for this cohort including CAMHS and the timely execution of EHCP plans.

Our resources are limited, but also, a lot of our team temporarily funded, with is another barrier for us

(Professional Focus Group)

This impacted the role that some agencies were playing in ROTH plans, with resource constraints meaning they were either absent, or unable to work in ways that were flexible to the complex realities of exploitation, resulting in a retreat to criminal justice-oriented work:

We had quite a lot of resources, and we don't have those resources now. You know, for the exploitation side of things, it's much more stringent now in terms of there's less flexibility to open children up to exploitation [support]. We need to be looking at the way that disruption, really, we have to have some kind of criminal activity now. So there's been a big shift and focus from the police perspective in what we are able to offer from that safeguarding point of view

(Professionals Focus Group)

The implications of these findings are discussed in section three below. First, we will consider the continuity between ROTH assessments and plans in the three local areas.

3. Case Studies from local areas: ROTH assessment and Plans



In addition to the focus groups, two assessments for young people on ROTH pathways and two sets of subsequent plans were collected from each of the three participating local areas. A range of assessment formats were used across the local areas, including initial child protection conference templates from traditional child protection processes, as well as multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) panel assessment templates. Plans included traditional child protection pathway plans adapted for the ROTH pathway. One local area provided MACE minutes in lieu of a specific ROTH assessment, and then the CP/ ROTH plan that followed this meeting.

This section provides a breakdown by local area to demonstrate the continuity between the needs of young people on ROTH pathways and their subsequent plans and the extent to which the ROTH pathway is supporting planning that meets the needs of the young people.

Needs	Services support and provision
Sexual harassment in community (risk of CSE)	Social worker (specialist exploitation team) to explore safety in/ around school with young person Work on online safety with young person
Associating with adults who are risk to children	Specialist intervention on grooming awareness Police talking to local business and exploring disruption/ orders of adults
Missing from home	Trusted family member to make regular calls to the young person
Friend involved in 'anti-social behaviour'	Explore structured activities with young person
Sexual assault of friend	Police investigation into assault
Behaviour in school - truanting	Change school timetables of young people at risk together
Frequent school exclusions	School inclusion team to discuss issues with peers (and to share with multi-agency group)
Alcohol misuse	
Domestic abuse and alcohol misuse in family history	
Mental health - depression	
Bereavement (close family relatives)	

This young person and some of her peers are at significant risk of/ are experiencing child sexual exploitation from older adults in the community. Some of the identified needs are being met by the ROTH planning. The young person is being provided with support to identify where she is at risk (presumably so children's social care and partners can take action in these spaces) as well as to understand the risks of grooming and exploitation (presumably professionals have identified her lack of awareness as a driver of her exploitation). The police are engaged to investigate the sexual assault and to disrupt the adults responsible for the exploitation. Work is happening with the young person to understand risks at and around school, and there is some intervention at school to understand peer relationships although support for the peer group is not mentioned, only disruption through timetable changes. There are gaps in support in relation to the young person's family needs (substance misuse, domestic abuse) which whilst historic seem to be playing a role in her current experience of extra-familial harm. There are also gaps in relation to the young person's substance misuse, mental health and emotional wellbeing.



Needs	Services support and provision
Substance misuse	Substance misuse work (not engaging)
CCE	Direct work around exploitation School sessions on exploitation within tutoring Location risk assessment Safety mapping with young person
Mental health (hearing voices)	
Overdose	
Autism and undiagnosed learning needs	ADHD assessment
High risk activity (danger to life)	
Associating with peers and adults involved in crime	Mapping meetings 'Good' and 'bad' friends work
Threats from peers	Parents to have oversight of phone (limited success)
Shoplifting	Work on consequences of offending behaviour
Threatened with weapon (in relation to drugs)	Police Community Support Officers to do community walk around
Carrying a knife	
Violence and harmful sexual behaviour towards siblings and other young people	
Unprotected sex under the influence of substances	Healthy relationships work (not engaging)
Regularly missing	All professionals invited to share information about young person's whereabouts (to police)
Uniform/ shoes too small/ bad condition	
Multiple school suspensions for aggression to other pupils	Group work explored with peers in school School to do home visits if 3+days absence

This young person is at high risk of child criminal exploitation. The ROTH plan has actions in relation to the young person's substance use (although they are not engaging), understanding of healthy relationships (in relation to good and bad friends and harmful behaviour towards others), understanding 'consequences' of offending behaviour, support at school, and an assessment for ADHD. There are also actions that target the community spaces in which the young person is at risk, these include PCSO walk-arounds, social care-led safety mapping with the young person and a location assessment. There are unaddressed needs in relation to the family and home, including violence from a parent, harmful sexual behaviour towards siblings, and support in relation to school uniform. The plan does not address the young person's mental health needs or overdose.



Needs	Services support and provision
Parents struggling to manage behaviour	Exploitation work with parents Safety plan with parents
Physical altercations with Mother	
Domestic abuse	
Parents separated	
CSE /sexual activity with multiple adult males	CSE flag on social care and partner case management systems Police doing joint visits with social worker
Sexual act with another minor	
Trauma resulting from sexual harm	
Peers who are at risk	Network meeting – social care and police around connected young people
Missing	Safety plan with young person (tracker on phone/ contact with parents)
Social isolation (from friends and family)	
Not regularly in college/ getting into trouble at college	
Drug and alcohol use and overdose	One substance misuse session
Self-harm	

The ROTH plan for this young person is centred on safety-planning with the young person and their parent in relation to exploitation and going missing and where they are spending time in the community. The social care and police partnership have the CSE risk flagged on their case-management systems and are conducting joint visits to the family. A substance-misuse service has been offered but the young person has only engaged with one session. There are gaps in relation to support around the family context and history, the young person's sexual activity, mental health and isolation from family and friends.

Needs	Services support and provision
Exploitation to sell drugs	Exploitation work with parents Police disruption tactics Bail conditions Safety plan with parents around searching house, sharing information with police
Smoking/ possession cannabis	
Attacked with knife	
Witness to stabbing	
ADHD/ Asperger's	ADHD medication
Parental separation	
Family breakdown (staying with grandmother)	Peer support for mum
Low self-esteem	
Bereavement (friend)	Pastoral support available at school
Confusion around identity	Social worker to allocate someone to do work around mixed racial identity
Weight loss	Healthy activities – i.e. gym

This assessment and plan are for a sibling pair experiencing criminal exploitation. The ROTH plan includes support for the parent, including peer support and safety planning as well as interventions from the police and criminal legal systems – notably bail conditions, information sharing and disruption. The young people have been offered pastoral support at school, healthy activities and support around their mixed racial identity. There are gaps in relation to the young person's mental health, having witnessed violence, experienced a violent attack and experiencing bereavement. There is also a gap around the young person's substance misuse, which is described as connected to their experience of exploitation.



Needs	Services support and provision
Concerns about CCE	Safety plan with parents – school attendance/ curfew/ behaviour
Selling drugs	
Carrying a knife	
Threatened by adult men in community	
Missing	Missing trigger plan
Daily cannabis use	Substance-misuse worker
Association with ‘gang involved’ peers/ peers involved with services	
Exposure to risks on social media	Mum restricts apps/ tracker on phone
Property damage	
‘Intense’ relationship with girlfriend	
Physical conflicts with family (relationship breakdown) -living with grandmother	Family network meeting Announced and unannounced social work visits Family first team Police called to incidents (between siblings)
Siblings all known to children’s social care for decade	
Familial substance misuse	
Father in prison	
Overcrowding at home	
Struggles with emotional regulation and anger	Receiving support from Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) in school
Difficulty concentrating/ low self-esteem/ poor self-care/ self-harm	Health needs assessment and speech and language therapy and support
ADHD/ ASD/ Autism	EHCP/ SEMH
Feeling unhappy	CAMHS
Doesn’t like school/ not accessing education	Mentor and tuition
Fights at school	Emotional wellbeing support in school



This young person is at risk of child criminal exploitation. The ROTH plan includes several support services for the family, including safety-planning with the parents, a family network meeting and support from the statutory family support team. The police are also involved in responding to incidents at home and missing episodes (with the use of a missing trigger plan). The young person has been offered support in school with both emotional wellbeing and tuition and is in receipt of multiple health services and assessments, including a substance misuse worker, a health needs assessment and support from CAMHS, SEMH and SALT. There are gaps in relation to the threats the young person is receiving in the community, family history and parental imprisonment, overcrowding at home, relationships with peers and girlfriend and selling drugs.

Local area three- Young Person 2C

Needs	Services support and provision
CSE	National Referral Mechanism referral Social worker doing safety plan with parents Project worker – healthy relationships and exploitation Social worker doing work around healthy relationships
Staying overnight with unknown male	Child Abduction Warning Notice (to adult male)
Associating with older people (drug dealers)	Ring doorbell
Physical possible sexual assault by older males	
Debt	
Missing from home with friend	
Concerns about associates	
Alcohol and cannabis abuse	Social worker doing work around drug use and substance misuse Substance misuse worker
Aspergers/ADHD	EHCP
Concerns about self-harm	CAMHS
Challenging behaviour in school	
Not accessing education	Home tuition as multiple schools reported 'could not meet needs'



This young person is at risk of child sexual exploitation. There are multiple professionals involved in psycho-educational work with the young person around exploitation and drug misuse. The family are being supported to keep the young person safe via a social care-led safety plan (details not included) and ring doorbell and the police have issued a Child Abduction Warning Notice to an adult male. The young person is supported via CAMHS and an EHCP although they are currently receiving home tuition as they are not in formal education.

Overall, the ROTH plans go some way to meeting the needs of young people on ROTH pathways, however there are gaps in relation to familial support (in some cases) and mental health support for young people as well as in relation to the contextual dynamics of extra-familial harm. Where support plans target the wider context, they rely on justice- (i.e. policing) led approaches. The focus of the plans remains largely individualised except for one location assessment (the details of which are not available) and some safety-mapping activity with children's social care. Given the context provided in the focus groups, it is likely that the ROTH planning is impacted by challenges with partnerships, the resource and permission to work differently, the overlap of extra and intra-familial harm and the significance of family and childhood history. These barriers are discussed further below.

4. Conclusion



Previous reports[6] on the piloting of the ROTH pathway have highlighted the challenges that local areas face when it comes to developing plans that target extra-familial contexts rather than solely focusing on the behaviour of parents and young people. They noted that developing plans that seek to build safety in the spaces where young people spend time, as opposed to managing their behaviour, could increase young people's engagement in the pathway, and indeed in the plans that they produce. Some of these issues persist here, with ROTH plans resembling traditional child protection plans (similar partnerships and focus on behaviour change) as noted by professionals in the focus groups. Also highlighted in previous reports on the ROTH pilots are the opportunities the ROTH pathway presents for positioning parents as partners; this was evident here, with the additional reflection that this partnership approach supports the success of plans, particularly when it comes to the level of parental support for plans[7]. As is evident, the support mobilised by ROTH pathways is largely characterised by traditional child safeguarding 'intervention'. Yet, the needs of young people on ROTH pathways point to a need for greater provision and support for young people, their families and communities.

Whilst it was noted that there is some way to go to get wider partnership buy-in to the ROTH pathway (which might improve multi-agency contributions to ROTH plans and consistency in approaches to young people), the ROTH pathway supported multi-agency collaboration and greater oversight and monitoring of young people. But oversight and monitoring alone is not enough to improve the safety of young people in extra-familial contexts, and this was flagged by professionals across the three focus groups and was evident in the ROTH assessments and plans.

Unmet need

There were needs unmet by ROTH pathway planning across the three domains of 'young people's', 'parent and family' and 'community needs':

Young people's needs: whilst the ROTH pathway aims to direct planning toward the wider contexts of young people's lives, the ROTH assessments and focus-group discussions identified a range of individual-level needs that were playing a significant role in young people's vulnerability to extra-familial harm or were a significant consequence of it. This most commonly included neurodivergence and learning needs impacting behaviour, with a knock-on effect for family life, relationships and educational stability. Mental health needs were significant across the dataset, which again preceded and were complicated by experiences of extra-familial harm. Similarly, substance misuse was repeatedly noted, across different forms of exploitation, as a need that created vulnerability to exploitation and abuse and that was also exacerbated by it.

[6][7] <https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/media/cwzczmyg/risk-outside-of-the-home-child-protection-pathways-learning-from-phase-2-pilots.pdf>



The challenge for ROTH planning is to support young people with these needs by addressing the contextual dynamics of neurodivergence, mental ill-health and substance misuse in addition to and beyond one-to-one therapeutic or psycho-educational support. Opportunities for this were apparent in the dataset and included familial level plans - i.e. family support around intergenerational mental health and substance-misuse issues and organisational level plans - i.e. earlier identification, child-friendly service design and removal of bureaucratic restrictions to creative interventions.

Parent and family needs: were both historical and present (including substance misuse, domestic abuse, sibling harm, overcrowding, mental health, poverty), and were impacting young people, their siblings and parents in significant ways. The relationship between intra-familial need or harm and extra-familial risk/ harm was significant across the data and was raised by professionals as a complicating factor with ROTH pathway planning - how much intra-familial need/ harm must be screened out for a young person to meet the threshold for ROTH instead of a traditional child protection pathway?

Community needs: Wider needs within contexts were identified in some cases, i.e. locations that require improvements to be safer for young people, peer groups that require support, and housing policies that need to adapt to the welfare needs of families, but partnership involvement, organisational resource and practice cultures at times prevented the sort of planning that might start to address these needs.

ROTH plans – opportunities and barriers to closing the gap between need and provision

Young people on ROTH pathways have a wide array of needs, and not all of them will or can be met by the ROTH pathway. Resource is a major barrier to local areas realising the types of plans that might build safety for young people across different contexts. But wider community and systemic factors also complicate the lives of young people and create significant vulnerabilities to harm; deprivation and family and community histories sit outside of and before ROTH pathways. Professionals shared their views about the limits of ROTH pathways in creating safety for young people:

Often the vulnerabilities of all these families still remain. And sometimes, particularly the harm outside the home referrals, you know, those risks, they can come off a ROTH pathway, and things can be better, and then twelve months later, those risks, again, have increased. And I guess that's the nature of what we're saying, you know? Of our area of deprivation, lack of resilience in parents, mental health in parents, domestic abuse, the trauma that the children have been through. Sometimes, it's not enough to keep them on that pathway, you know, to become a successful adolescent and young adult.

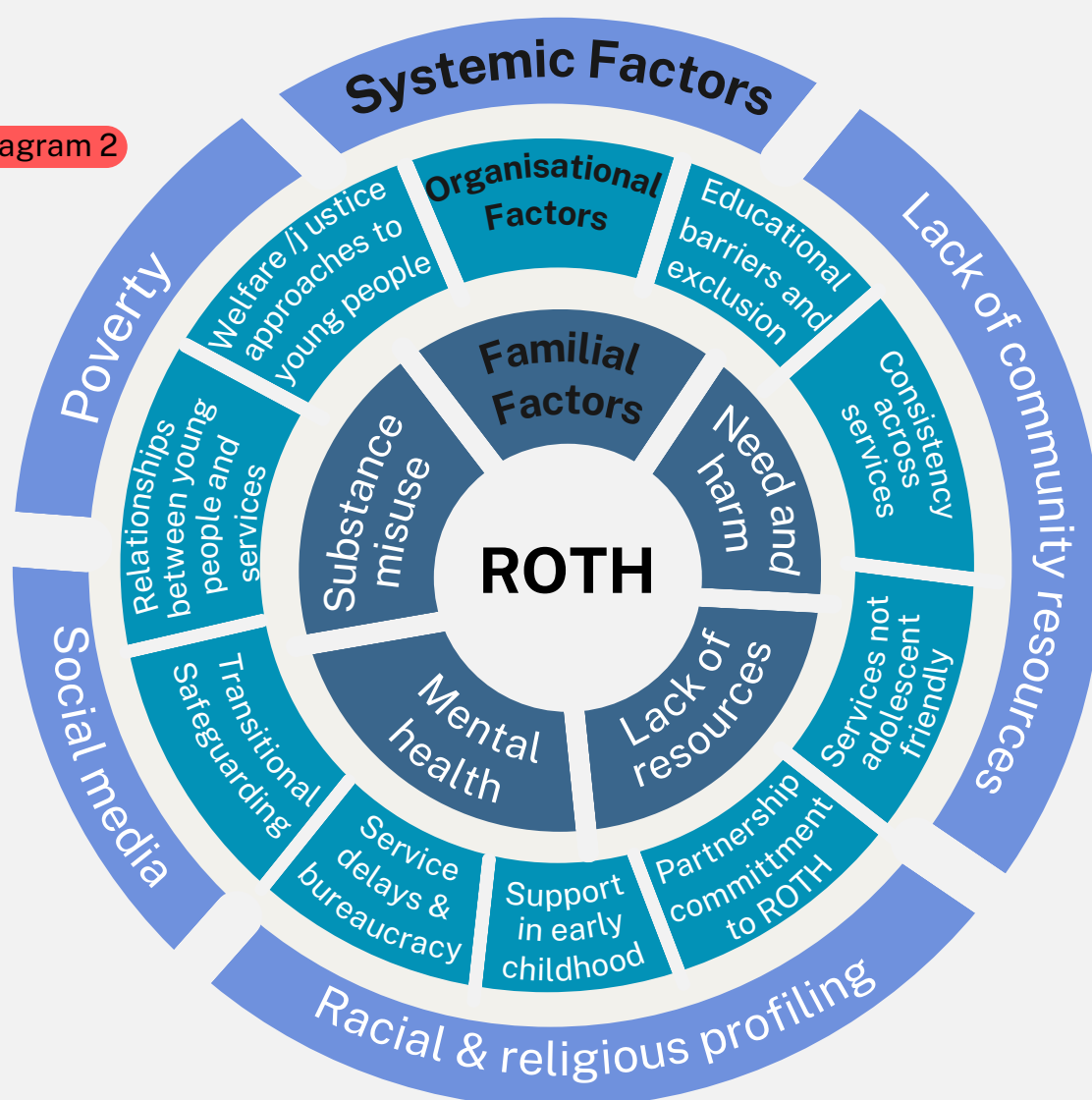
(Professional Focus Group)

I just feel as if we are really good at identifying what we need that would help achieve or work towards achieving those outcomes, but it's almost impossible, because of the length of time or the lack of resources.

(Professionals Focus Group)

Diagram 2 maps out the impact of familial, organisational and wider societal contexts on the current ability of ROTH pathways to meet the holistic needs of young people. Some areas call for wider organisational and systemic change to support the aims of the ROTH pathway. Examples include addressing poverty and lack of resource in communities; challenging the media and government policy on racism and religious profiling; more effective early childhood and familial support; and, improving the waiting times and delivery models of services across the system. These should be key policy areas for the future implementation of ROTH pathways. Other areas could be addressed through future ROTH pilots. Recommendations are made below as to the priority areas for future ROTH policy and practice implementation.

Diagram 2



5. Recommendations



Whilst it is recognised that ROTH pathways cannot address all these challenges, the following recommendations are made:

- 1.** Both traditional child protection pathways and ROTH pathways should address familial need and support families. Whilst parents as partners is a positive outcome of the ROTH pathway this should not be the defining difference between traditional child-protection and ROTH pathways. Familial need interacts with intra-and extra-familial harm; adopting a binary position on parents as subjects or partners of plans only entrenches a lack of familial support with negative consequences for young people. A needs-oriented and welfare-based response to extra familial harm needs to be embedded across the system including in traditional child protection pathways, Early Help, Child in Need, Looked After Children and transitional safeguarding teams and across all partners working with young people on ROTH pathways.
- 2.** Resource is a major barrier to implementing ROTH plans that meet the holistic and contextual needs of young people. Policy work with stakeholders needs to centre resource (re)allocation in the continued rollout of ROTH pathways with a focus on wider provision (i.e. housing and education) not solely ‘intervention’.
- 3.** ROTH plans should go beyond a focus on individual need and behaviour change, but this does not mean that issues such as neurodivergence, mental health and substance misuse are not addressed by ROTH plans. Rather, it means understanding how these needs interact with the wider contexts of young people’s lives and their experiences of harm and safety. ROTH planning should prioritise contextual responses to these issues that build safety in the places and services around neurodivergent young people, those with mental health needs and those experiencing addiction/ self-medicating with substances, with a priority on ensuring these young people are identified and supported earlier in childhood and that the systems and services around them are accountable.

6. Next Steps



This work will be repeated in 2026 with the current ROTH community of practice set-up sites to monitor the ongoing development of ROTH pathways.