



From Crisis to Stability, From Harm to Hope





From Crisis to Stability, From Harm to Hope

Our Strategy 2026 - 2029

Contents

From Crisis to Stability, From Harm to Hope	03
The children and young people we work with	04
The reality for young Londoners	05
Safer London as a guiding light	05
How we make a difference	06
Centring Youth Voice	07
The Change We Want To See	08
Strategic Goals	09
Creating Safety and Hope	09
Breaking New Ground	10
Being Bold and Visible	11
Data and Evidence	12
Financial Sustainability	12
How we will achieve our strategic goals	13





FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

From Crisis to Stability, From Harm to Hope

From harm to hope is the journey we walk with young Londoners every day.

At Safer London we work with children and young people who've already experienced serious harm - including violence, exploitation, grooming or coercion. Many have faced frightening or traumatic situations.

We meet them once a week for an hour, face to face, in places where they feel safe - like a school, café, park or youth centre. Together we understand what can help them feel and be safer.

Too often, public conversations treat the violence children experience as if it lives within the child, as if it reflects who they are. We think differently. We know it's about the contexts they are living in and trying to survive.

The children and young people we support are living lives shaped by systemic issues far beyond their control.

Many have experienced extreme poverty, social exclusion and racial injustice. Too many have grown up with regular exposure to violence, whether this be in their homes or something they've experienced because of their race or gender. Some are more vulnerable because of special educational needs, disabilities and mental health challenges.

The diversity of the young people and communities we work alongside highlights how existing systemic inequalities - across race, gender and disability - shape their experiences of risk and harm.

These overlapping pressures create contexts where safety is fragile and where young people become susceptible to grooming, exploitation and control by those who intend to cause them harm.

The young Londoners we work with have been harmed, some have also harmed others. We understand that some young Londoners can be both victims and perpetrators of exploitation or violence at the same time.

Young people who have experienced trauma often have a heightened response to stress or threat. This duality doesn't diminish their need for care and support - it deepens it. Most are still children when they come to us - and they all need someone to stand by them.

We want people to understand how young people are drawn into danger and to see them as children first. Children at risk.

A future free from harm and full of possibility can feel out of reach. But with skilled and unwavering support it is possible. That's why we stay for as long as it takes, building trust, increasing safety and reducing risk, until hope becomes something they can see - and something they can step into.

For every single child we help, there are thousands more who need our support. That's why we are aiming to grow direct work and are committed to influencing systems and shaping policy alongside this.

In this way we can improve the lives not only of the children we see, but of the thousands more children and young people in London and across the UK who also need things to change.



The children and young people we work with

A quarter of the young Londoners we work with are neurodiverse. The figure is likely to be higher due to delays in diagnosis or no diagnosis at all.

Nearly 60% of the young people we work with live in areas ranked among the most deprived local authorities in England.

The average age of those we work with is 15, with 75% aged 18 and under and more than half aged 16 and under.

71% of the children and young people we work with are from racially minoritised communities. Over half are from Black communities and just over a quarter are Asian.

Mental health and emotional wellbeing support is one of the most common needs among the young people we work with. This includes support with managing emotions and coping under pressure.

Support with education is also a recurring need, particularly around staying engaged in school or finding the right learning environment.

The scale and complexity of harm of the children we work with

Almost 60% of the young people we support face multiple, overlapping risks at the same time – including community violence, exploitation and periods of going missing.

Of the children and young people we work with:

- 72%** have been affected by gang activity or violence within their community.
- 57%** have experienced sexual exploitation, abuse or violence.
- 50%** have been subjected to criminal exploitation, including trafficking.
- 21%** have had repeated or prolonged periods of going missing from home.

Safeguarding concerns are also rising sharply.

Over one year, serious safeguarding concerns at Safer London increased by 139%, more than doubling from 161 to 385 in just six months. Over 220 of these involved urgent, high risk situations – including young people being stabbed, going missing, or arrested for serious offences.

While all young people experience harm in complex ways, the nature of risk often differs for girls and boys.

For girls and young women, risk is heavily shaped by sexual exploitation and harm.

- Girls' experiences are dominated by sexual harm, with over three quarters affected by sexual exploitation, sexual abuse or harmful sexual behaviour.
- They also face community and contextual violence, with a third of girls affected by gangs or violence in the community.
- A significant number experience missing episodes, reflecting a pattern of vulnerability linked closely to exploitation.

For boys and young men, risk is predominantly driven by criminal exploitation and violence in the community.

- Boys' experiences centre strongly on gang involvement and community violence, with around 70% affected.
- They also face high levels of criminal exploitation and trafficking, impacting nearly two thirds of boys.
- A smaller but still important group experience sexual exploitation, abuse or harmful sexual behaviour, affecting 13%.



FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

The reality for children and young people

London is often seen as a city full of opportunities, but for many young Londoners this perception doesn't align with their reality.

Growing up in challenging and sometimes hostile environments, many children and young people face significant pressures and obstacles.

30,000

It's estimated that 30,000 children and young people in London have carried a knife - the equivalent to a third of Wembley Stadium's capacity.

1 in 4

1 in 4 children have either been a victim of violence or have perpetrated violence themselves. Almost half (47%) had witnessed violence in the last 12 months and 60% had seen 'real world' violent acts on social media.

Black children arrested by the Met police were offered diversion in 17.2% of cases, while for white children that figure was 35%

750,000

It's estimated that 750,000 children a year are exposed to incidents of domestic abuse.

1/2

Over half of children in some London boroughs grow up in poverty. 50% of Black children in London grow up in poverty.

1 Million

957,000 - almost 1 million - young people aged 16 to 24 in the UK are not in employment, education or training.

21%

School suspensions rose by 21%, increasing from 786,961 to 954,952 - and there were also 10,885 permanent exclusions.

100 days

More than half of young people referred to CAMHS do not receive treatment within four weeks, despite demand for children's mental health support having more than doubled since 2016 - and many face waits exceeding 100 days or even a full year.

47%

Children with SEND make up just 15% of students, yet account for 47% of permanent exclusions and 45% of suspensions

Safer London as a guiding light

Rooted in the voices and experiences of young Londoners, this Strategy sets out how we will build hope with them.

Against this backdrop we set out our commitment to be a guiding light for young Londoners, families and for other organisations.



We will be a guiding light for young Londoners and families who've experienced harm, building the trust, understanding and support they need to move from harm to hope.



We will be a guiding light for organisations, building best-in class practices, providing a stand-out example of how this work can transform young lives.



We will be a guiding light for our team, working together to create excellent support, development and flexibility.



I found working with my caseworker really helpful, she helped me see the **light at the end of the tunnel**.

Every session I had with her I felt more confident in myself and happier. I felt like this all came from the fact that she was genuine with everything she said and did.

It felt like I was talking to somebody who **actually cared**.

- Young Londoner who accessed Safer London support



How we make a difference

We focus on those already affected by harm

- We work with children and young people who've already been affected by harm, violence and exploitation.
- We support young Londoners who've been harmed, some who've harmed others, and some both - without judgement. We understand trauma and we know that children who hurt others have often been hurt themselves.

We build trusted, long term relationships

- We work directly in the community, meeting young Londoners once a week for as long as they need, with support lasting up to two years.
- We meet them where they feel safe - in schools, parks, cafés, youth centres and other community settings.
- As a non-statutory organisation, we can build trust where others may struggle. Many young people feel judged or let down by systems. Our approach creates relationships where they feel understood, supported and heard.

We offer specialist and targeted support

- We provide specialist support focused on working with neurodiverse young people who've experienced harm, as we know they are often targeted for exploitation and are more vulnerable to criminality and violence.
- We have a distinctive model for supporting young Londoners displaying Harmful Sexual Behaviours - one that focuses on strengths, safety and understanding rather than punishment.
- We offer targeted support for parents and carers - even when their child is not working with us. Parents and carers are often the strongest protective factor in a young person's life, yet many feel judged, excluded or sidelined by services. By supporting families directly, we help strengthen stability, increase safety and create the conditions for lasting change.

We are skilled, expert and trauma informed

- Our team is highly skilled and specialised. They work with complex risk, navigate multi agency environments and deliver expert, trauma informed interventions. Our caseworkers advocate within wide and often complex professional networks and systems, making sure young Londoners receive coordinated, high quality support.
- We invest in ongoing support and development for our team to maintain the highest standards, helping to achieve the best outcomes for young Londoners.

We learn, innovate and influence

- We innovate and share learning to influence systems and practice, both locally and nationally.
- We amplify young Londoners' voices, ideas and opinions, as well as work with partners to improve responses across services and systems.



FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

Centring youth voice

We know that real, lasting change can't be achieved unless children and young people's own voices shape the decisions that affect their lives.

While our team brings expertise in safeguarding, young people bring something just as essential - direct insight into the realities they are navigating every day. They are the experts in their own experiences and their perspectives must inform our work and the wider systems and services around them.

Throughout the development of this Strategy, we listened to the voices of the Safer London VIPs - a group of young people who've all accessed our services and support. Their experiences, priorities and ideas have shaped our direction, and they will continue to do so as we move forward.



We need to **be heard**, not just listened to

- Young Londoner VIP

Too often, young people affected by harm and exploitation are spoken about rather than spoken with. Their insights can be overlooked in favour of professional assumptions or punitive approaches.

By placing young people's perspectives at the centre of strategic conversations - within Safer London and across wider systems - we help create responses rooted in understanding, dignity and safety.



Opportunities shouldn't feel like charity, but like **empowerment**

- Young Londoner VIP

To create meaningful and sustainable change, we must consistently amplify youth voice and make sure it influences practice, policy and system responses. At Safer London, we are working to shift power so young people can influence the decisions and structures around them.

Our commitment is to provide platforms, pathways and opportunities for young Londoners, as well as parents and carers. Through coproduction, youth led research and structured participation, their voices will guide service design, test new models, challenge what isn't working and strengthen calls for system change.

Our aim is clear - to make sure young peoples' insights influence not just Safer London's work, but the systems that surround them - so that change reaches far beyond the young Londoners we work with directly.



FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

The change we want to see

At Safer London we believe a safeguarding – not criminalisation – approach should be prioritised when working with children, young people and families affected by violence and exploitation.

Too often, systems and services working with young people who've experienced these forms of harm focus on punishment, managing behaviours or criminalisation, rather than understanding the child's experiences. This approach frequently feeds cycles that perpetuate further harm, instead of offering support that creates safety for the individual child and prevents harm to their peers and wider communities.

We want systems and services to move away from punitive responses and towards approaches that prioritise safeguarding, healing and prevention. Our ambition is to use our voice and resources, guided by our knowledge, data and the input of young Londoners, to shape the policies, practices and attitudes that impact young people's lives.

We aim to influence regional and national policy and sector standards, working with partners to embed best practice and evidence-based models into statutory and voluntary services. We will challenge systemic inequalities that drive harm, including poverty, racism and exclusion, and call for investment in sustained, long-term support.

While our roots are in London, our vision goes further. By sharing learning, building partnerships and amplifying youth voices, we aim to influence systems across the UK, so that what works for children and young people becomes standard practice everywhere.

Our commitment to driving and influencing change

Making sure that children and young people are at the heart of conversations about exploitation and youth violence, so their voices and lived experiences influence decision making and the systems around them.

Advocating for trauma-informed and non-criminalising approaches across services, so professionals respond with understanding and care rather than punishment.

Influencing regional and national policy and sector standards, working with partners to embed best practice and evidence-based models into statutory and voluntary services.

Challenging systemic inequalities that drive harm, including poverty, racism and exclusion, by calling for investment in prevention and long-term support.

Calling for investment for a network of specialist intervention services like ours in all major towns and cities across the UK.



FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

Strategic Goal: Creating Safety and Hope

We will create safety, hope and future perspective for young Londoners and families.

We continue to help young Londoners find stability in times of crisis. We will work with them to identify what they need to be safe and stay safe, and collaborate with multi-agency partners to make that happen.

Safety and Hope Objectives

- We will create a progressive journey for young Londoners, while they are working with us and as they move beyond Safer London.
- We will diversify our models and approaches including growing our distinctive Harmful Sexual Behaviour service.
- We will make sure our services are fit for young people who are neurodiverse and those with special educational needs and disabilities.
- We will intensify our focus on those most at risk by analysing our data, focusing resources where they will have the greatest impact.
- We will increase the independence and sustainability of our core service, growing by 5% each year.

How youth voice and participation will support our goals

- We will involve young Londoners in informing, influencing and shaping services that meet their needs.
- We will actively listen and respond to feedback through clear mechanisms.
- We will co-design approaches that reflect the lived experience of the young Londoners we work alongside.

How we will influence others

- We will share best practice and evidence with partners and others to strengthen multi-agency safeguarding responses.
- We will deliver training and resources to professionals on trauma-informed approaches and relationship-based practice.
- We will advocate for systemic improvements in safeguarding policies and funding to make sure young Londoners get long-term flexible support that meets their needs.



FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

Strategic Goal: Breaking New Ground

We will break new ground through innovation – researching, testing and launching services and products that make a difference.

Innovation is how we keep moving forward – challenging gaps and building solutions shaped by young Londoners’ voices.

Breaking New Ground Objectives

- We will build a culture of innovation across Safer London, where everyone is supported to contribute ideas and improve outcomes for young people.
- We will bring developed ideas forward to funders, sustaining our Harmful Sexual Behaviours service in year 1 and growing it in year 2, and secure investment for our young researchers and VIP programme.
- We will share learning and evidence widely – with young people, communities, practitioners and policy makers – so that what works for children and young people becomes standard practice in London and beyond.
- We will research and test next step models, including developing a peer intervention framework and other emerging approaches.
- We will understand the impact of our models, using robust and innovative evaluation methods to learn what works and continually improve practice.

How youth voice and participation will support our goals

- We will engage young Londoners as co-researchers in developing new models.
- We will support youth-led innovation projects and ideas.
- We will make sure young Londoners’ insights shape evaluation and learning.

How we will influence others

- We will publish and disseminate learning from our innovation projects to influence sector-wide practice.
- We will partner with academic institutions and decision makers to embed evidence-based models into other services.
- We will organise cross-sector forums and events to challenge gaps and promote new solutions for emerging needs.



FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

Strategic Goal: Being Bold and Visible

We will be bold and visible in voicing what generates violence and exploitation, whilst advocating for change.

We will use voice – and amplify young Londoners’ voices – to speak up on the issues that matter most to them. By influencing systems, services and policy, we aim to change the conditions that create harm in the first place.

Bold and Visible Objectives

- We will proactively speak out and call for change on the issues affecting young Londoners, making sure their voices shape public debate and influence policy and system change.
- We will build a strong network of ambassadors, including those with lived experience, to amplify youth voice and champion change locally, regionally and nationally.
- We will use online and digital platforms to share our messages, expanding our reach and mobilising others to support our mission.
- We will advocate for specialist support services like ours in every major city and town, promoting models that prioritise safeguarding, healing and long term support.
- We will increase our visibility by engaging a broader range of stakeholders, making more people understand, support and champion our work.
- We will leverage existing community, organisational and government networks to raise our profile, strengthen relationships and extend the reach of our influence.

How youth voice and participation will support our goals

- We will strengthen our Young Researchers programme to inform advocacy.
- We will support the development of Youth Voice Ambassadors to share lived experiences.
- We will create platforms and opportunities for young Londoners to speak directly to decision-makers.

How we will influence others

- We will support or lead advocacy campaigns at local and national levels to address systemic drivers of harm.
- We will build coalitions with other organisations to amplify the voices of children and young people and push for system change.
- We will engage with media and utilise public platforms to shift narratives around young Londoners affected by violence and influence societal attitudes so people see the child behind the harm.



FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

Strategic Goal: Transform Evidence & Insight

We will transform how we build evidence and use data to deliver insight, impact and improvement for young Londoners and families.

To create the change young Londoners need our decision making, planning and development must be grounded in insight. Data and evidence help us understand what works, identify gaps, improve our practice and demonstrate our impact.

Data and Evidence Objectives

- We will develop an overarching and operational monitoring, learning and outcomes framework that supports both strategic oversight and day to day decision making.
- We will transform how we use data and evidence so we can drive impact, learning and continuous improvement.
- We will evidence and share the difference we make for young people and families, making sure our impact is visible and understood.
- We will revolutionise the visibility and usability of our data, making it easy for the whole organisation to access, understand and act on.
- We will collaborate across the organisation to interrogate our data and learning, using insights to adapt, improve and innovate.
- We will take a whole organisation approach that brings together staff, Trustees, young researchers and VIPs in how we use data and evidence.
- We will use our data to galvanise support for our work, strengthening our influence with partners, funders and communities.

Strategic Goal: Financial Sustainability

We will build long term financial sustainability by investing in fundraising so we can continue our work, grow our impact and plan confidently for the future.

A sustainable Safer London is one that can show up consistently for young people, innovate boldly and plan for the long term. By strengthening and diversifying our income, building efficient systems and developing financial confidence across the organisation, we protect our mission and create the stability needed for sustained impact.

Financial Sustainability Objectives

- We will invest in fundraising to secure our sustainability for young people, diversifying and strengthening how we generate income.
- We will increase income from trusts, foundations and other income streams alongside statutory contracts, expanding the support behind our work.
- We will invest in corporate partnerships by developing a clear corporate case for support and a compelling partnership offer.
- We will test an individual mid level giving proposition focused on young women's work, and research and test a new product in 2027-28 with plans to scale in 2028-29.
- We will create efficiency across the organisation by streamlining business processes and exploring the use of AI where appropriate.
- We will strengthen contract and financial management across the organisation and develop a more dispersed model of financial knowledge, management and responsibility.
- We will manage our reserves to remain within the agreed policy range and manage and forecast cashflow closely.
- We will manage our investments to grow income and strengthen long term financial resilience.



FROM CRISIS TO
STABILITY, FROM
HARM TO HOPE

How we will deliver our strategic goals

Our strategy depends on the people who lead it and the people who deliver it every day.

Strong governance makes sure we stay true to our mission, make good decisions and remain accountable. A supported, connected and skilled team brings our work to life for young Londoners.

By investing in our Board, our staff and our organisational culture, we can create the conditions that allow us to achieve our strategic goals - and makes sure that Safer London remains a place where excellent work can happen.

Governance Objectives

- We will diversify our Board so it better reflects the population of London and the communities we support.
- We will include young people within our governance framework, making sure their voices shape leadership and decision making.
- We will increase meaningful contact between the Board and staff team, strengthening understanding, connection and shared purpose.
- We will develop the Board as ambassadors and fundraisers, supporting them to champion our mission and extend our reach and influence.

Our Team Objectives

- We will increase connectivity across the organisation, building stronger relationships, communication and collaboration.
- We will co produce an exemplary support offer for our team, making staff feel valued, heard and equipped to thrive.
- We will increase our focus on career development, creating clear pathways for progression and growth.
- We will retain employer accreditations, including Disability Confident and other marks that reflect our commitment to inclusion and wellbeing.
- We will work closely with the Staff Forum on issues that matter, making sure staff insight and experience play a central role in shaping our culture and decisions.





From Crisis to Stability, From Harm to Hope

Our Strategy to be a guiding light for young Londoners,
families and other organisations.

Safer London is a registered charity in England and Wales No. 1109444;
and a company limited by guarantee No. 5190766.

www.saferlondon.org.uk