



National Strategy for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse in Wales (2025 – 2035) – Consultation

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Ministerial foreword

Childhood sexual abuse is a heinous crime. It profoundly impacts victim-survivors, affecting their health, relationships, education, employment, and overall wellbeing. The effects of child sexual abuse reverberate through families, communities and society.

The voices of people who have been affected by sexual abuse are central to this strategy and its delivery. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse heard from over 6,000 individuals who courageously shared their stories. I know that many more children and adults will have shared their experiences, and I want to thank them all for doing so. We will honour this bravery by continuing to listen and learn and by using this learning to shape policy and practice that reflects people's lived experiences.

Research indicates that 25,000 children in Wales experience some form of sexual abuse each year, yet only a fraction of these children come to the attention of services like the police and social services. The scale and nature of child sexual abuse we are seeing has changed considerably over the course of the past few years, particularly in online spaces. Child sexual abuse is a complex form of abuse that can be perpetrated by individuals or groups, children and adults.

To effectively prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and support those affected, we must 'think the unthinkable'. Child sexual abuse does happen, and it happens within families, groups, communities, online and in institutions. Abuse thrives in secrecy: therefore, we must break down taboos, myths and barriers around this topic; exposing it to the light so we can protect children and young people more effectively.

Due to the complexity of this form of abuse and the considerable harm it causes, it is clear, we need a comprehensive, cross-government, whole system approach to tackle sexual abuse. This strategy sets out how we will work with key stakeholders including people who have been affected by sexual abuse to prevent sexual abuse; respond effectively to children when there are concerns; and support all those who are affected in Wales.

I want to thank all who contributed to the development of this draft strategy, particularly, adult victim-survivors. We will deliver a strategy that will ensure people in Wales who are affected by child sexual abuse will be protected and supported effectively now and into the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dai Davies', is positioned at the bottom left of the page.

Definitions

We use the term ‘child sexual abuse’ to refer to all forms of abuse, as set out in the Welsh Government’s definition of child sexual abuse:

“...forcing or enticing a child to take part in sexual activities, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening, including: physical contact, including penetrative or nonpenetrative acts; non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.” (Welsh Government, 2019:4)

‘Child sexual exploitation’ has been defined as a form of child sexual abuse which can include sex or any form of sexual activity with a child; the production of indecent images and/or other indecent material involving children. It occurs to those up to the age of 18 years old. It involves some form of exchange: the exchange can include the giving or withdrawal of something, such as the withdrawal of violence or threats to abuse another person. There may be a facilitator who receives something in addition to or instead of the child who is exploited. Children may not recognise the exploitative nature of the relationship or exchanges and may feel that they have given consent. (Welsh Government, 2019:4, [Safeguarding children from child sexual exploitation | GOV.WALES](#))

We also use the term ‘harmful sexual behaviour’, as described in the Welsh Government’s definition: “... sexual behaviours expressed by children under the age of 18 years that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards themselves or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult. This definition of harmful sexual behaviour includes both contact and non-contact behaviours (including grooming, exhibitionism, voyeurism and sexting or recording images of sexual acts via smart phones or social media applications.” (Welsh Government, 2019:4) For the sake of simplicity, and in line with the above definition, we use the term ‘child’ to refer to anyone under the age of 18; it is important, however, to remember that adolescents as well as young children can be sexually abused. An exception comes where we are discussing sexual orientation and gender identity, where we refer to ‘young people’.

In referring to people who were sexually abused as children, we use the term ‘victim-survivors’, in recognition that each individual may regard themselves as a victim, a survivor or a combination of both.

We use the term ‘parent/carer’ to encompass any parent or carer in a parental or principal caregiving role to a child; this may be, for example, the child’s biological parent, stepparent, adoptive parent, foster parent or other relative in that role.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) defined organised networks of sexual offending as:

“An organised network is characterised by two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are known to (or associated with) one another and are known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children. Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children includes introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation, trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation, taking payment for sexual activities with a child or allowing their property to be used for sexual activities with a child.”

Section 1: Introduction and context

Child sexual abuse is a grave violation of a child's rights with long-lasting consequences for victim-survivors, their families and society. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach that spans prevention, identification, response, and support.

The Welsh Government vision is that:

All children in Wales live their lives free from the harm of child sexual abuse and all those affected by child sexual abuse are protected and supported across their lifespan.

Safeguarding children and young people is everyone's responsibility. This strategy outlines a whole system approach designed to prevent child sexual abuse, ensure timely and effective responses when there are concerns about child sexual abuse, and provide the necessary support for victims and their families for them to recover well when they have been affected by child sexual abuse.

A whole system approach involves coordinating efforts across various sectors and services and includes:

1. Prevention: Educating communities and implementing policies to reduce the risk of abuse.
2. Identification: Training professionals to recognise signs of abuse and report it.
3. Response: Providing support and treatment for victim-survivors and ensuring legal actions against perpetrators.
4. Collaboration: Ensuring that agencies like schools, health, police, courts, social services and others work together effectively.
5. Monitoring and Evaluation: Continuously assessing the effectiveness of interventions and making necessary adjustments.

The remainder of this section of the strategy explains the:

- Scope of the strategy
- Key drivers
- Key values underpinning the strategy
- How the strategy was developed
- Priority actions we have identified for the first three years of the strategy.

In **Section 2** of this strategy, we have explained what we know about the scale and prevalence of child sexual abuse and identify key messages from research and practice that informed the development of this draft strategy.

In **Section 3**, we set out the strategic objectives that have been co-produced with stakeholders including adult victim-survivors and the priority actions that we believe we need to take under each of the objectives.

The strategic objectives are:

1. Prevent child sexual abuse
2. Protect children who have experienced child sexual abuse
3. Support children and families affected by child sexual abuse
4. Support adult victim-survivors of child sexual abuse

Section 4 of this strategy explains the cross-over policies, strategies, plans and programmes within Welsh Government and the UK Government that will either directly or indirectly contribute to achieving our vision. Section 4 also sets out the structure and governance arrangements we propose to put in place to assist us to deliver this strategy.

1.1 Scope of this strategy

This strategy encompasses sexual abuse across the whole of the lifespan and aims to address child sexual abuse, in all the settings it can occur, including online and offline sexual abuse, abuse that takes place within institutions, groups, families, social groups and communities and whether the abuse is perpetrated by individuals or groups of individuals, adults or other children.

The strategy encompasses all types of sexual abuse. The typology of sexual abuse is illustrated best in ‘A new typology of child sexual abuse offending published by the Centre of Expertise on child sexual abuse in collaboration with the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies, Middlesex University in 2020’¹.

Child sexual abuse within the family environment - focuses on the sexual abuse of a child or young person by an adult family member, or by an adult who is connected to the family or to one of its members.

Child sexual abuse through trusted relationships outside the family environment - focuses on the sexual abuse of a child or young person by someone who holds a position of authority over them because of a professional or vocational role. It includes child sexual abuse carried out in institutions but also in the community, both in the UK and overseas, where the perpetrator can establish a position of power (in relation to the child or young person, their family and/or the local community) through the trust implied by their role.

¹ [A new typology of child sexual abuse offending](#), Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse in collaboration with the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies, Middlesex University in 2020

Child sexual abuse through an intermediary - focuses on sexual abuse of a child or young person which is carried out by more than one perpetrator; the perpetrator who initiates the abuse (the initiating perpetrator) seeks to gain access to the child, or to images of the child, through another perpetrator (the intermediary perpetrator). The intermediary perpetrator may believe they are in an intimate relationship with the initiating perpetrator, or they may be coerced into facilitating and/or committing the abuse.

Child sexual abuse through online interaction - focuses specifically on situations where a perpetrator, operating online, encourages/deceives/ coerces a child or young person to take part in online sexualised conversations or sexual acts, and/or to produce images (photos or videos) of themselves that they share with the perpetrator online.

Child sexual abuse through viewing, sharing or possessing images - is the viewing of images of child sexual abuse that have already been created. This can include viewing, possessing and sharing images (photos or videos) with others, generally (but not exclusively) online. Child sexual abuse through groups and networks. This type centres on sexual abuse committed by perpetrators who are part of a group or network. This may be a social group, gang or network that meets in person, or a group or network in which members interact online and remain anonymous. The abuse may include contact abuse and/or the creation/sharing of images of child sexual abuse. It is facilitated and encouraged through the perpetrators' membership of the group/network, i.e. the members may jointly plan and/or incite each other to commit abuse or escalate the abuse.

Child sexual abuse arranged and perpetrated for payment - involves the sexual abuse of a child or young person by one or more perpetrators where, in return for payment (either financial or other), a perpetrator ('the seller') offers other perpetrators ('buyers') access to the child or young person for contact abuse and/or creates and sells images (photos or videos) of abuse, e.g. via live-streaming.

Child sexual abuse through a personal connection - abuse committed by a perpetrator who establishes a personal connection with a child or young person and grooms or coerces them into sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse through attack by an unknown person. This type of abuse describes situations where a perpetrator, who is unknown to the child or young person, attacks and sexually assaults them.

Child sexual abuse through attack by an unknown person - describes situations where a perpetrator, who is unknown to the child or young person, attacks and sexually assaults them.

Group based sexual exploitation can take place on and offline. Group based sexual abuse is defined by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse as:

“An organised network is characterised by two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are known to (or associated with) one another and are known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children. Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children includes introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation, trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation, taking payment for sexual activities with a child or allowing their property to be used for sexual activities with a child.”

More recently, Baroness Casey’s audit of group-based sexual exploitation (published 16th June 2025), identified the following features of groups who sexually exploit:

- Offender networks are often loosely interconnected and based around existing social connections. This means they are often broadly homogenous in age, ethnic background and socioeconomic status. Acting within a group is likely to have a disinhibiting effect on the perpetrators.
- A 2020 Home Office paper noted that in several cases they examined, offenders and victims came from different communities, and officers suggested that disregard for victims from outside the perpetrators’ own community may be an enabling factor for offenders.
- It also noted that empathy with victims is a likely barrier to offending behaviour, and therefore disregard for victims - whether through misogyny or so-called 'othering' - enables offenders to overcome this barrier. Operation Stovewood consider this to have been a factor at play in Rotherham, where nearly two-thirds of offenders were from a Pakistani ethnic background, and the majority of the girls were White.
- There are also examples of cases of group-based child sexual exploitation within communities.
- Investigations have uncovered cases where child sexual exploitation is linked with and overlaps with organised criminal networks’ criminal activities.
- However, networks are not generally viewed as organised, for example, in having a ringleader or hierarchy except in relation to other crimes that offenders might be involved in such as the serious and organised supply of drugs.

1.2 Key drivers

Key drivers for this strategy include:

- The National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2019-2022
- The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

- National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Baroness Casey of Blackstock DBE CB June 2025

The following Wellbeing Objectives set by Welsh Government in the Programme for Government for 2021-2026:

- Protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people.
 - Provide effective, high quality and sustainable healthcare.
 - Celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all its forms.
-
- A Healthier Wales: Long term plan for health and social care
 - The strategy directly supports the seven connected wellbeing goals for Wales in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 including a resilient Wales; a healthier Wales; and a more equal Wales. The strategy has been developed in line with the five ways of working set out in the Act, which says that we must:
 - Take account of the long term.
 - Help to prevent problems occurring or getting worse.
 - Take an integrated approach.
 - Take a collaborative approach.
 - Consider and involve people of all ages and with diverse characteristics and needs.

National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse

The first National Action Plan for [Preventing and responding to child sexual abuse: national action plan | GOV.WALES](#) was published in July 2019 and came to end on 30 June 2022. A report reviewing progress under the Plan, including a Delivery Report was published in November 2022.

The first plan accomplished many goals:

- Establishing Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) under the new Curriculum as a mandatory education offer.
- Awareness raising with children, young people, parents and carers, public and professionals about child sexual abuse.
- A range of resources were developed by Barnardos, Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, Lucy Faithful Foundation Cymru and Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) department in the National Crime Agency and others. These resources are for children, young people, parents and carers, public and professionals and focus on raising awareness of child sexual abuse. For example, the Lucy Faithful Foundation Cymru were commissioned to deliver training to parents and carers about preventing and responding to

child sexual abuse. This Welsh Government funded work will continue until March 2026.

- The delivery of multi-agency training on child sexual abuse was commissioned by Welsh Government.
- Peer on peer sexual harassment guidance was published in 2023.
- The All Wales Practice Guides, Safeguarding children from child sexual exploitation, Safeguarding children from harmful sexual behaviour and Safeguarding children from online harm were published in 2021.
- Cardiff University was commissioned to develop online learning sessions and resources on safeguarding young people from sexual exploitation and related safeguarding issues such as child criminal exploitation, trafficking and going missing for professionals.
- Corporate Safeguarding Good Practice Guidance was published in 2022.

The Delivery report recognised the ever-changing context of child sexual abuse; face to face, abuse in online spaces, and the need for us to continually review and adapt our collective response to meet these challenges.

The report outlined where further work needed to be done beyond the life of the first plan. This included:

- Raising awareness and changing attitudes towards child sexual abuse.
- Developing pathways of proportionate responses for children involved in harmful sexual behaviour.
- Supporting consistent safeguarding approaches across Wales.
- Ensuring information is shared in accessible places, including online.
- Providing ongoing learning for the multi-agency workforce.
- Monitoring the impact of practice tools on identifying and understanding child sexual abuse.
- Mapping therapeutic services across Wales.
- Promoting information for adult survivors and children nearing 18.
- Developing consistent and accurate data collection on child sexual abuse.

The areas for further work have been incorporated into this document and extended to include support for adult victim-survivors of child sexual abuse.

Since the first plan ended in November 2022, Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSBs) (the body that has the lead role in safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk in their regions), have continued to work on the priorities from that plan. The priorities continue to be reflected in the strategic aims identified by the theory of change process adopted to guide the development of this strategy.

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)

The Inquiry was established in 2015 following calls from the public for a national inquiry to respond to the ongoing revelations about high profile people sexually abusing children, particularly from Operation Yewtree, the investigations into Jimmy Saville.

Between 2015 and 2022 the Inquiry conducted 15 investigations, held 4,205 Truth sessions and published 19 reports. The reports included:

- [The Internet Investigation Report](#) published in March 2020
- [The Anglican Church Investigation Report](#) published in October 2020
- [The Roman Catholic Church Investigation Report](#) published in November 2020
- [Child protection in religious organisations and settings investigation report](#) published in September 2021
- [Child sexual exploitation by organised networks investigation report](#) published in February 2022
- [The residential schools investigation report](#) published in March 2022

The Inquiry published its final report in October 2022. The final report made recommendations to UK Government and Welsh Government.²

All recommendations made to Welsh Government were either accepted or accepted in principle. The response from Welsh Government was published on 20 April 2023³.

The recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- Recommendation 1: Develop a core data set (accepted).
- Recommendation 2: Child protection authorities to be established in England and Wales (accepted in principle).
- Recommendation 3: Establish a Cabinet Minister for children (accepted).
- Recommendation 4: Raise public awareness (accepted).
- Recommendation 13: Introduce mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse on individuals (accepted in principle).
- Recommendation 16: Provide specialist therapeutic support to child victims of sexual abuse (accepted in principle).

² [The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse | IICSA Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#)

³ [Written Statement: Update on the Welsh Government response to the IICSA final report recommendations \(20 April 2023\) | GOV.WALES](#)

Welsh Government committed to:

- a) Strengthen and improve compliance with our regulatory frameworks across childcare, education, health, and social care.
- b) Build on the publication of our Code of Safeguarding Practice, to engage widely and explore views on ensuring that others who provide services or offer activities for children and for adults who may be at risk, have proportionate and effective safeguarding arrangements in place.
- c) Seek further views about and explore the implications of placing duties to report children and adults at risk, on individuals, as part of the conversation on next steps.
- d) Combine this with further measures to promote access to effective training and tools for practitioners; and to raise and sustain public awareness of abuse, neglect and harm, and the vital steps to take where this is happening or suspected.
- e) Be informed by a better understanding of what prevents people from raising and reporting concerns and aim to empower individuals with the confidence to seek the support that they need or know how they can respond to others, to help lessen dangers and secure support for children and adults at risk.

Welsh Government's response to the IICSA recommendations has been underpinned by the following beliefs:

- Maintaining and extending the organisational approach in the first instance, with ongoing consideration of creating individual mandatory duties to report.
- Maintaining our people approach: children *and* adults at risk.
- Including all types of abuse, neglect and in the case of children, harm.
- Preference for sanctions other than criminal (e.g. professional, disciplinary).

Developing a core data set

The Welsh Government Performance and Improvement Framework includes a detailed set of indicators on children's safeguarding, including details of the number of children being placed on the Child Protection Register, their age and categories of abuse, whether child exploitation is suspected or known, the number of meetings and enquiries, and outcomes of those meetings. The data is continually reviewed and refined with local authorities. Welsh Government recognises that other agencies will also hold important safeguarding data.

We will be establishing a national multi-agency stakeholder group as part of this strategy that will focus on bringing together multi-agency safeguarding data to centralise and build on the important work that Regional Safeguarding Boards, the National Independent Safeguarding Board, and partner agencies have undertaken to date. Developing a core data set for child sexual abuse will be a priority for this

strategy. This should include data that tells us more about children involved in harmful sexual behaviour, people who have committed sexual offences against children and people who have thoughts of sexually abusing children.

Establishing Child Protection Authorities in England and Wales

As outlined in the initial Welsh Government response (April 2023) to the IICSA recommendations, in Wales, the national functions of improving practice in child protection and providing advice and making recommendations to government on policy and reform in these matters, are primarily designated to the National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB), under section 132 of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014.

In relation to the inspection function proposed within this recommendation, there are already a number of different bodies with powers to inspect relevant institutions or settings e.g. Care Inspectorate Wales for childcare, regulated social care and local authority social services; Estyn for schools, colleges, higher and adult education; Healthcare Inspectorate Wales for NHS and independent healthcare services and private dentistry; as well as HMI Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services and HMI Prisons and Probation.

A Minister for Children

At the time Welsh Government responded to this recommendation by explaining that there were four Ministers with responsibility for children, two of whom attended Cabinet. These were the Deputy Minister for Social Services, Minister for Health and Social Services, Deputy Minister for Mental Health and Well-Being and the Minister for Education and Welsh Language.

In 2024, the Minister for Social Care in Wales (Dawn Bowden MS) became the Minister for Children and Social Care and lead minister for safeguarding. The Minister's portfolio now includes Early Years, Childcare and Play as well as social care.

National Awareness Raising Campaigns

In November and December 2023, we launched the awareness raising campaign 'Making the Call'. The campaign aimed to raise awareness of the need to report concerns and was aimed at people living in communities who may be worried about a child; this is stage one of meeting the wider requirements of this recommendation.

The campaign builds on awareness raising undertaken by Regional Safeguarding Boards.

Welsh Government has also supported the development of the NSPCC awareness raising campaign, Listen Up, Speak Out that was commissioned by Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board in response to a Child Practice Review by funding Welsh translation of all the marketing materials.

We are currently exploring ways in which this campaign could be scaled up nationally and the strategy includes an action for delivering a campaign that specifically raises awareness of child sexual abuse.

Mandating duties to report on individuals

In Wales we fervently believe that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and that the safety and well-being of individuals is paramount. The Welsh Government has existing duties to report adults and children at risk in place through sections 128 and 130 of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014.

These impose legal obligations on 'relevant partners' of local authorities (Local Health Boards, NHS Trusts, the Police, Probation services, Youth Offending Teams) to inform the authority where they have reasonable cause to suspect that an adult at risk or a child is experiencing or is at risk of abuse, neglect or, in the case of children, harm.

These are organisational duties, supported by statutory guidance and the Wales Safeguarding Procedures which provide clear advice on what practitioners and organisations should do when they believe a person has suffered harm or is likely to do so.

To comply with these statutory duties, 'relevant partners' need to have their own effective corporate policies, procedures and support in place to ensure those exercising functions on their behalf (i.e. staff, contractors, volunteers) know their responsibilities, sufficiently understand and are enabled to act in accordance with the duties.

Many individuals working for relevant partners, such as teachers, health professionals, social care workers, police, and probation officers, are registered with professional bodies and must adhere to codes of conduct. They have contractual and professional obligations to report concerns, with disciplinary actions possible.

Welsh Government wholly agrees with the principle that where there has been any disclosure (from a child or perpetrator); witnessing; or observation of behaviours or other evidence that indicates a child is experiencing or is at risk of sexual abuse, these must be reported without delay.

Our existing organisational duty to report under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 requires this of local authorities and ‘relevant partners’ like police and health.

In August 2022, a consultation on the Health and Social Care Bill was undertaken to explore views on mandating a duty to report on individuals; there was no prevailing consensus. There were calls for further exploration and consultation to consider the detail, breadth, and impacts of any new duties. Further work is ongoing with key stakeholders, including a survey and a series of roundtable events which are in progress, to inform any next actions.

This strategy will be the vehicle by which we continue to implement the recommendations made by IICSA.

Welsh Government has continued working with partners to review and improve existing safeguarding processes as we committed to. Examples of this work include:

- [Strengthening safeguarding requirements for Independent Schools](#) through the [Independent School Standards \(Wales\) Regulations 2024](#), which came into force 14 February 2024.
- Legislating to [regulate special school residential services](#) in a similar manner to care homes for children, [through Regulations](#) which came fully into effect on 31 March 2024.
- Issuing a [revised National Minimum Standards for regulated childcare](#) which strengthens the standard in relation to safeguarding.
- Publishing [a quality framework for Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care](#) which includes a quality standard around safeguarding babies and young children from harm, abuse and neglect.
- Ongoing engagement with policy leads for Play and Childcare who are currently reviewing the Exceptions Order. The Exceptions Order is the criteria for determining whether play and childcare settings fall within the regulatory and inspection framework.
- Strengthened the safeguarding elements of the Choosing Childcare leaflet for parents and carers developed by Cwllwm⁴
- Engaged with sports colleagues to explore further actions to strengthen existing safeguarding systems in sport.

Specialist therapeutic services for those affected by child sexual abuse

Welsh Government is committed to ensuring that victim-survivors of child sexual abuse are offered specialist therapeutic support when they need it. The recommendation was accepted in principle on the basis that we needed to consider,

⁴ [Resources | cwllwm](#)

with partners, the options for commissioning and delivering this support and other support for children and adults affected by sexual abuse. Key partners in this include local authorities, health, police, third sector agencies and private providers.

Public services, private providers and third sector providers provide support to people who have been affected by child sexual abuse in Wales. Due to the disparate nature of support services, Welsh Government commissioned the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse in 2023, to provide an analysis of available specialist and non-specialist provision for children and adults who have been affected by sexual abuse in Wales.

That report is completed and forms the foundation of further actions that will be undertaken as part of this strategy (the findings and recommendations of this report can be found in Section 2 of this document). The Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCS) Sexual Assault Workstream are undertaking a review of therapeutic counselling provided which is being led by the NHS Joint Commissioning Unit. The review will help ensure services are timely and accessible. This work is part of a wider review of the health elements of SARCs to strengthen future commissioning.

The new Mental Health and Well-being Strategy published in April 2025 sets out future actions to ensure mental health services are trauma informed, person centred, and needs led.

Implementation and monitoring of IICSA recommendations

The National Independent Safeguarding Board (NISB) took on the role of monitoring Welsh Government's implementation of the IICSA recommendations in 2024 and receive quarterly update reports⁵.

National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Baroness Casey of Blackstock DBE CB June 2025

The national audit identified:

- Gaps remain in the data and in work to properly understand the nature of group-based child sexual exploitation, the motivations and drivers of offenders and the impacts on victims.
- Improvements have not been implemented with sufficient rigour or determination, have been allowed to drift, or have not been acted on.

The audit makes 12 recommendations.

⁵ [Annual Report 2023-24 - Safeguarding Board Wales](#)

Whilst most of the recommendations are for police and other reserved matters, the response to the sexual exploitation of children involves devolved services such as health and social services.

1.2 Programme for Government/links to strategy

This strategy links to the following Wellbeing Objectives set by Welsh Government for 2021-2026:

- Protect, re-build and develop our services for vulnerable people.
- Provide effective, high quality and sustainable healthcare.
- Celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all its forms.

‘A Healthier Wales: our plan for health and social care⁶’ was published in 2021 and is a cornerstone of the Programme for Government. The plan sets out the long-term future vision of a ‘whole system approach to health and social care’, which is focussed on health and wellbeing, and on preventing illness.

The plan describes how we will develop and deliver a whole system approach to health and social care, in which services are only one element of supporting people to have better health and wellbeing throughout their whole lives. It is a ‘wellness’ system, which aims to support and anticipate health needs, to prevent illness, and to reduce the impact of poor health. This whole system approach will be equitable. Services and support will deliver the same high quality of care, and achieve more equal health outcomes, for everyone in Wales.

The plan is underpinned by the following shared values:

- Co-ordinating health and social care services seamlessly, wrapped around the needs and preferences of the individual, so that it makes no difference who is providing individual services.
- Measuring the health and wellbeing outcomes which matter to people and using that information to support improvement and better collaborative decision making.
- Proactively supporting people throughout the whole of their lives, and through the whole of Wales, making an extra effort to reach those most in need to help reduce the health and wellbeing inequalities that exist.
- Driving transformative change through strong leadership and clear decision making, adopting good practice and new models nationally, more open and confident engagement with external partners.
- Promoting the distinctive values and culture of the Welsh whole system approach with pride, making the case for how different choices are delivering

⁶ [A healthier Wales: long term plan for health and social care | GOV.WALES](#)

more equitable outcomes and making Wales a better place in which to live and work.

1.3 Key values underpinning the strategy

A child-centred approach involves putting the child at the centre of all we do. This means prioritising their needs, perspectives, and well-being in every decision and action. Ensuring that children feel heard, valued, and supported is fundamental to this approach.

We explain further on in this strategy that we have commissioned a literature review to establish what research can tell us about what children and young people think works well in safeguarding them from or responding to child sexual abuse. We have undertaken the literature review to assist us in tailoring further consultation with children and young people who have been affected by child sexual abuse given the sensitivity of the subject matter and the risk of re-traumatising the children and young people who take part.

We intend to establish a children and young people's advisory group to assist us in delivering the strategy. The group will assist us in identifying resources that work well to keep children and young people safe, identify gaps in the information available to them and their families and develop new resources to address these gaps. The group will also provide an ongoing touchpoint/sense check for the work being undertaken underneath the strategy.

A rights-based approach focuses on raising awareness and upholding people's rights by educating them about their rights, advocating for their rights, and ensuring policies reflect human rights principles.

The work of this strategy is underpinned by a children's rights approach as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child⁷. The priorities in this strategy relate to:

- Embedding collaborative action to prevent sexual abuse and protect children and young people when sexual abuse has occurred
- Empowering children and young people to know about and feel capable to claim their rights to be safe from harm
- Listening to children and young people's needs to shape and inform the services and care they receive
- Putting in place systems that enable equitable access, experience and outcomes for all people, without exception
- Increasing the ability and accountability of individuals and institutions who are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling people's rights.

⁷ [UN Convention on Rights of a Child \(UNCRC\) - UNICEF UK](#)

The strategy will support human rights and children's rights, aligning with the Equality Act 2010 and the UNCRC. This will include taking actions to address the relevant recommendations from the UN Committee's Observations report 2023. The Children's Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) and Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) that will be published alongside the final version of the strategy explain the relevant Articles in more detail.

Equity of access, experience, and outcomes means ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, background, or other protected characteristics, can access services, have the best experience of those services, and achieve the best possible outcomes. This approach seeks to eliminate barriers and disparities, promoting fairness and inclusivity in all aspects of service delivery and support.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Over the next decade, our strategy will ensure that issues around equality, diversity, and inclusion are fully considered and addressed within each workstream and as part of a comprehensive approach to change.

Section 4 of this strategy explains the relationship between this strategy and the following:

- Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan
- LGBTQ Action Plan
- Disabled People's Rights Plan
- The Social Model of Disability
- The Gender Equality Plan

Over the ten-year period of this strategy, we will collaborate within Welsh Government, with UK Government, and other key partners to improve data collection that enables us to identify protected characteristics, supporting us to target our resources most effectively.

The [Anti-racist Wales Action Plan](#) (ArWAP), published in June 2022, highlighted the deeply rooted racial inequalities experienced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people in Wales. It focuses on the realities of institutional and structural racism, emphasising that ethnic minority people are disproportionately disadvantaged at nearly every level of every system. By acknowledging this uncomfortable truth, ArWAP urges Wales's Public, Private and Third Sectors to confront the extensive nature of racial inequalities and recognise the often-unintentional advantages experienced by certain groups. It calls for the courage, as a nation, to confront systemic injustices and work collectively towards meaningful change.

In Wales, since 2017 the number of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children looked after has been increasing. The numbers have nearly doubled from 455 to 830. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children now make up 11.6% of looked after children in Wales, a 3.3 percentage point increase compared to the data reported in the initial iteration of the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan (ArWAP) ([Stats Wales, 2023](#)). In comparison, for the wider population, approximately 9.5% of children aged 0-15 report to be from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background ([Annual Population Survey](#)). 7.1% of children on the child protection register and 2.4% of adults at risk of abuse or neglect are from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, significant gaps in data remain, with ethnicity information missing for 25.9% of at-risk adults and 18.4% of children on the child protection register.

It is clear from the evidence collected so far that the numbers of care-experienced children are increasing, there is incomplete data regarding ethnicity for people receiving care and support and people working in social care are still experiencing racism. While gaining a deeper understanding of the issues is essential to take appropriate action, it is crucial that action be taken urgently. The new [National Office for Care and Support \(National Office\)](#) provides the means by which a collective sector-wide response can be coordinated.

The LGBTQ+ Action Plan for Wales has been established to help coordinate action by the Welsh Government and other agencies. The plan sets out an overarching vision to improve the lives of, and outcomes for, LGBTQ+ people. It includes a wide range of policy-specific actions relating to human rights, education, improving safety, housing, health and social care, sport, culture, and promoting community cohesion. The Welsh Government commits to defend and promote the rights and dignity of trans and non-binary people, and to make those communities feel welcome and included in Welsh society.

For all LGBTQ+ people, Welsh Government has committed to:

- strengthen equality and human rights ([Welsh Government 2022a](#))
- make Wales a safer place
- make Wales a Nation of Sanctuary for LGBTQ+ migrants
- improve healthcare outcomes
- ensure education in Wales is inclusive
- improve inclusion and participation in all areas of life
- listen to, and work with, our LGBTQ+ communities
- defend and promote the rights of trans and non-binary people

The Plan sets a benchmark for how Welsh Government will achieve these challenging and ambitious goals and build a society where LGBTQ+ people are included and celebrated.

The Social Model of Disability makes an important distinction between ‘*impairment*’ and ‘*disability*’. It recognises that people with impairments⁸ are disabled by barriers that commonly exist in society. These barriers include negative attitudes, and physical and organisational barriers, which can prevent disabled people’s inclusion and participation in all walks of life.

According to the social model of disability, **impairment** is what has historically been referred to as a “disability” or a health condition. For many (but not all) disabled people, their impairment is a significant part of their life and may form part of their personal identity. For some people, their impairment may require considerable management, and they may need ongoing medical support. Experience of impairment is personal. Everyone’s experience is different. That experience is always valid and always important.

Disability by contrast is the inequality, disadvantage, disempowerment or discrimination which may affect people with impairments because of barriers to access and inclusion. For example, a staircase is a barrier to a wheelchair user; providing a lift removes that barrier. Just a few other examples of barriers include the lack of British Sign Language (BSL) or a loop system, the lack of braille, large print or audio information, the lack of flexible and part time working opportunities, the lack of appropriate social care or lack of understanding of mental health issues or autistic spectrum disorder. Disability is therefore something which affects people with impairments but is different from impairment. Disability is something which disables someone with an impairment. Barriers can be removed. If you remove the barrier then you remove the disability.

This approach to disability was developed by disabled people and was formally adopted by the Welsh Government in 2002. This approach is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People, to which the UK is a signatory. The UN Convention states that “disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. If fully realised, the Social Model would transform society, removing barriers and meaning that disabled people would be able to participate fully in society.

We will create awareness materials for families, victim-survivors, and professionals using the most effective communication methods. Both online and offline access will be ensured, and Youth Friendly, Easy Read and British Sign Language versions will be created. Documents will be translated to ensure inclusivity across all sections of our communities.

⁸ Impairments are characteristics of a person. They may or may not be lifelong and they may or may not arise from illness or injury. They may affect a person’s appearance and/or the way they function or communicate and/or they may cause a range of difficulties including pain and fatigue.

The Gender Equality Review defines intersectionality as recognising the way in which power structures based on factors such as gender, race, sexuality, disability, class, age, and faith interact with each other to create inequalities, discrimination, and oppression. It is crucial to understand how these characteristics can interact and produce unique and often multiple experiences of disadvantage in specific situations.

A truly intersectional approach ensures that no single form of discrimination is understood in isolation from others. We recognise that having more than one protected characteristic can amplify the impact of child sexual abuse on children, families and adult victim-survivors.

In Year one we will develop a communication and engagement plan which will detail how we intend to engage with individuals with protected characteristics, ensuring their contributions influence and shape policy and practice. Additionally, we will prioritise improving our methods for collecting data regarding child sexual abuse and the protected characteristics of those who are affected. This will enable us to develop a better understanding of the scale and prevalence of abuse and how best to target resources.

Welsh Language

Receiving support in one's first language is crucial for survivors of child sexual abuse. The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 grants official status to Welsh in Wales, ensuring it is treated equally to English when providing services.

The Welsh Government envisions Wales as a welcoming, bilingual, diverse, and inclusive nation. The "Cymraeg 2050: Welsh Language Strategy" aims to achieve a million Welsh speakers, supporting the "More Than Just Words Five Year Plan (2022-2027)," which promotes the use of Welsh in health and social care. The vision is for Welsh to be seamlessly integrated into services, so individuals receive appropriate care without needing to request it, resulting in better outcomes.

The More Than Just Words Framework aims to advance Welsh language planning and policies by focusing on data collection, developing Welsh language skills in the workforce, and sharing best practices.

As part of this consultation, we have included specific questions regarding the Welsh language. There is also a Welsh version of the draft strategy and consultation questionnaire available.

1.5 How the draft strategy was developed

A series of engagement events with key stakeholders took place between December 2023 and March 2024. The facilitators utilised the theory of change model, focusing

on the overall outcome desired and working in reverse to establish how to achieve this. Over 150 people attended the four workshops we held.

Since the workshops were held, a smaller core group of people acting as critical friends have worked together to co-produce the strategy, including the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, Barnardos, NSPCC and the Lucy Faithfull Foundation.

Key partners and stakeholders who have helped us to develop this strategy are:

- Adult victim-survivors of childhood sexual abuse
- Third sector organisations such as NSPCC, Barnardos, Lucy Faithfull Cymru and the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse
- Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSBs) and their constituent agencies such as local authorities, police, and health
- National Independent Safeguarding Board members (NISB)
- Welsh Government policy leads for modern slavery, safeguarding in education, Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV), policing and community safety, trauma informed framework and mental health.
- A Children and Young People's version of the strategy has been developed to support children and young people to respond to the consultation.
- Additionally, we have commissioned a literature review to identify what children and young people have already told researchers about their experiences, what worked well for them and what needs to change. As part of the review, the researchers will consider whether there are gaps in the knowledge base and if so, will advise us on how we should consult with children and young people who have been affected by child sexual abuse whilst ensuring we avoid re-traumatising participants.
- An Easy Read version of the strategy has been developed to support responses from all sections of the community.

We will be working with the UK Government Home Office and other departments to jointly take action on child sexual abuse. We will be fully engaging with the national inquiry into group-based child sexual exploitation instigated by the Prime Minister and working with Policing in Wales and across policy areas such as Crime and Justice and Modern Slavery. We will ensure that the voices of Welsh children, families and adult victim-survivors help to shape legislation and policy now and into the future.

Further information about the role of crime and justice partners in preventing and responding to child sexual abuse can be found in Section 4 of this strategy.

Consulting with children and young people

Whilst we have engaged with adult victim-survivors via workshops, we have carefully considered how to ensure the voices of children and young people affected by child sexual abuse are reflected in this strategy. To manage this ethically and sensitively, we have commissioned a literature review to explore the last five years of international research that gathers the views of children, young people and adult victim-survivors affected by all types of child sexual abuse.

The review will focus on insights from children, young people and adult victim-survivors on what works well to prevent child sexual abuse, what works well in the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse, what needs to change and what works most effectively to support them to recover from abuse.

The literature review will summarise existing research, identify examples of good practice as described by children and young people, highlight gaps in the knowledge base, and recommend whether further consultation is needed to fill these gaps and provide advice as to how this could be achieved mitigating any risk of re-traumatisation.

Once the literature review is completed, we will amend the strategy to reflect the findings, including any further consultation we have undertaken with children and young people. This approach ensures that children's voices will be heard and fully integrated into the strategy.

1.6 Priority actions we have identified

The following actions have been agreed with our stakeholders as a priority, and we believe implementing these changes will make a significant difference to practice in this area and thereby improve outcomes for people in Wales. This is not a hierarchical list, and all the priority actions are of equal importance:

1. Improve the collection, reporting and analysis of child sexual abuse data and use it to inform policy and practice.
2. Raise awareness with children, families and communities, about how to identify and report concerns about child sexual abuse.
3. Encourage open conversations about healthy relationships, sexuality, sexual health, and sexual abuse among children, parents, carers, communities, and professionals.
4. Ensure the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse is supported by robust evidence, is child centred and consistent across Wales by implementing a national pathway for child sexual abuse.

5. Raise awareness of and provide training on the national pathway for proportionate responses to harmful sexual behaviour that was developed under the original National Action Plan.
6. Develop and implement a child sexual abuse training framework in line with the groups explained in the National Safeguarding Training Standards developed by Social Care Wales (SCW).
7. Support practitioners from all organisations to identify child sexual abuse, feel confident to report concerns and those with safeguarding roles to assess and manage risk effectively.
8. Address the challenges faced by services that provide specialist and non-specialist support for children, families and adult victim-survivors to ensure people affected by child sexual abuse can access the right support at the right time for them

Section 2: Why do we need a ten-year strategy to address Child Sexual Abuse in Wales?

In this section of the strategy, we explain the impact of child sexual abuse on individuals across the lifespan, examine the known scale and prevalence of child sexual abuse in Wales, and identify key messages from research and practice through the lens of typologies of child sexual abuse and the four strategic objectives we have agreed with stakeholders.

The impact of child sexual abuse is lifelong and can affect every aspect of an individual's life. Though each individual's experience is unique, research has identified the following impacts on the lives of victim-survivors⁹:

- Anxiety, depression, eating disorders, sleep disruption, dissociation, PTSD, and personality disorders.
- Various physical health issues, including gastrointestinal, gynaecological, cardiopulmonary health, and chronic pain.
- Impacts on psychosexual and psychosocial development, impacting sexual functioning and relationships in adolescence and adulthood.
- While some victim-survivors practice protective parenting, others face challenges with boundaries.
- The impact varies based on the child's age, relationship to the abuser, duration of abuse, other childhood experiences, and responses to disclosure.
- The impact is also influenced by sex, culture, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity¹⁰.
- The abuse affects non-abusing parents and society, with high emotional and financial costs (over £10 billion annually)¹¹.

2.1 The scale and prevalence of child sexual abuse

As stated in Section 1 of this document, there is a need to improve data collection, reporting and collective analysis and the improve the sharing of data to inform policy and practice development around child sexual abuse. As a minimum we should be working towards collection of the same data as England.

Data about child sexual abuse is currently collected by a variety of different agencies, using a variety of IT systems and there is no simple solution that would enable us to understand the full scope and prevalence of child sexual abuse in Wales currently and this would only include information about the 'known'

⁹ [Publications & Resources | Key messages from research | CSA Centre](#)

¹⁰ [Publications & Resources | Key messages from research | CSA Centre](#)

¹¹ [The economic and social cost of contact child sexual abuse - GOV.UK](#)

prevalence. We know that victims of child sexual abuse may never disclose their experiences of abuse, or it may take a long time for them to speak out about their experiences.

Improved data would enable us to identify themes, patterns and intelligence quickly and accurately. A collaborative system for sharing and analysing this data would ensure that all agencies and organisations supporting children, young people, families and adult victim-survivors affected by child sexual abuse have the fullest picture possible and this supports the best use of limited resources.

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse published a report in June 2021 entitled, 'The scale and nature of child sexual abuse: Review of evidence'¹². (*This is a revised edition of the evidence review completed by the CSA Centre Measuring the scale and changing nature of child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation, originally published in 2017 and updated in 2018.*)

This report identified the following headlines about child sexual abuse in England and Wales:

- 500,000 children and young people who are sexually abused each year in England and Wales
- 15% of females and 5% of males in England and Wales experience sexual abuse before the age of 16
- Children and young people are the victims in 40% of all sexual offences and yet make up only 20% of the population
- Far more children experience abuse than are being recorded by police or identified by child protection services.
- Where a child lives affects the likelihood that their abuse will be identified and responded to.
- Children from minority ethnic backgrounds are under-represented in all agency data.

It is estimated that 25,000 children and young people are sexually abused each year in Wales. In Wales, the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse's *Child sexual abuse in 2023/24: Trends in official data*¹³ shows that close to 6,000 child sexual abuse offences were recorded by the police in 2023/24 but only 14% of investigations in Wales resulted in a decision to charge the offender(s).

The number of children placed on the child protection register under the category of sexual abuse has declined steadily in Wales over the past 20 years (Karsna and Kelly, 2021). In 2023/24, just under 200 children in Wales were registered on the Child Protection Register due to sexual abuse, 15% fewer than in the previous year and accounting for only 5% of all registrations in that year.

¹² [The scale and nature of child sexual abuse: Review of evidence](#)

¹³ [Child sexual abuse in 2023/24: Trends in official data](#)

The variation among local authorities in the use of registrations due to sexual abuse is significant: the proportion of children whose registration included sexual abuse as a reason, ranged from 0% to 19% of all child protection registrations in 2023/24. More information about the local data in Wales can be found in the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse [Data Insights Hub](#).

Child Protection Registration is only one measure we use as an indicator of the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Wales. This refers to the number of children and young people who have a care and support protection plan in place and their names have been added to the Child Protection Register because of sexual harm/abuse.

Stakeholders advise us that they are working with many more children and young people under a voluntary care and support plan and that children who are care experienced are also at high risk of sexual abuse. We need to develop systems that capture this experience at a national level. Improving data collection and sharing is a priority for this strategy.

Figure 1 below illustrates the pervasive hidden nature of child sexual abuse and demonstrates that statutory services are currently supporting a small minority of children who have experienced sexual abuse whose names have been added to the Child Protection Register, whilst many others will be supported on a care and support plan, many children may not have come to the attention of child protection services at all. This is supported by other research findings.¹⁴

Figure 1: Child Sexual Abuse in Wales



¹⁴ [CSA-in-Wales-childrens-services-Briefing.pdf](#), Roberts S. 2020

2.4 Key messages from research and practice

We have used the typologies of child sexual abuse we have referred to in Section 1 of this document¹⁵ and the four strategic objectives we have identified through co-production, as a guide to ensure we have considered all relevant key messages from research and practice.

Child sexual abuse within the family environment

A recently published report from the Safeguarding Review Panel in England entitled: “I wanted them all to notice”: Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment¹⁶, highlights the following key points:

While evidence shows that most child sexual abuse occurs within the home or is committed by someone the child knows, abuse by family members or within the family’s network often goes unidentified by practitioners. This results in victim-survivors not being effectively protected or supported in their recovery.

The report concludes that there is uncertainty and confusion among practitioners about discussing abuse with children, creating a culture of fear and silence. Practitioners rely too heavily on the criminal justice system to confirm abuse, and the perceived need for proof ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ paralyses the system, leaving children unprotected even when they report abuse.

The report also identified that parents often face unrealistic expectations to protect their children without proper guidance and support, feeling disbelieved or blamed by practitioners. Inconsistent identification and response to sexual abuse based on individual characteristics and types of harm is also an issue.

Sibling sexual abuse

Sibling sexual abuse is considered one of the most common forms of child sexual abuse within the family setting in the UK. Children are more likely to be sexually abused by their siblings (brothers, sisters, stepbrothers, and stepsisters) than by their parents¹⁷.

Research indicates that sibling sexual abuse can have severe and long-lasting effects on survivors’ health and well-being. The trauma experienced can lead to

¹⁵ [A new typology of child sexual abuse offending](#), Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse in collaboration with the Centre for Abuse and Trauma Studies, Middlesex University in 2020

¹⁶ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67446a8a81f809b32c8568d3/CSPRP_-_I_wanted_them_all_to_notice.pdf

¹⁷ [Sibling sexual abuse project - SARSAS](#)

various emotional, psychological, and behavioural issues. Efforts to address this issue include raising awareness, providing support for survivors, and improving professional responses to disclosures of sibling sexual abuse. During the development of this strategy, stakeholders have consistently raised the need for a whole family approach to this issue.

The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA Centre) has stated that sibling sexual abuse is a common form of sexual abuse that has devastating consequences for the whole family. Differentiating between normative sexual behaviour among siblings and abusive behaviour is crucial for effective intervention and support¹⁸.

Sibling sexual abuse has severe and long-term impacts. Responses to such abuse should balance safety, healing, and justice. Professionals must be able to recognise the range of sibling sexual behaviours and understand the experiences of the children involved.

Clear communication with parents and carers is vital, and professionals should be equipped to support and talk to parents when concerns about sibling sexual abuse arise.

This is an extremely complex area of practice. To effectively address it, an empathic, whole-family approach is needed. This includes conducting comprehensive assessments, promoting reflective learning, and prioritising safety to prevent further abuse. We need to increase professionals understanding of the context in which sibling sexual abuse is more likely to occur. Research tells us this that children living with domestic abuse and/or experiencing neglect are at high risk.

Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB)

Harmful sexual behaviours' HSB can be defined as: sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards themselves or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult. In Wales this definition of HSB includes both contact and non-contact behaviours, including harmful sexual behaviour that occurs online¹⁹.

Whatever context harmful sexual behaviour occurs within, there is an acceptance that the harm caused to all children involved is no less impactful, whether the harm is contact in nature, non-contact in nature or occurs within digital spaces. Those who

¹⁸ [Sibling sexual abuse: A knowledge and practice overview - CSA Centre](#)

¹⁹ All Wales Practice Guide and Procedures 2019.

display HSB and those harmed by HSB in any context must therefore receive care, support and protection that is proportionate to their individual needs.

Prevalence of Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Child sexual abuse is a complicated and challenging issue for professionals, particularly so when the abuse is displayed by a child towards another child. A UK study by Radford L et al 2011²⁰ highlighted that a third of reported contact CSA was carried out by another child. This figure remained largely unchanged for almost a decade. Estyn's 'We don't tell our teachers' 2021²¹ report into sexual bullying and harassment within education settings, found that the most prevalent context reported by children experiencing this form of harm was online. While there is an increase in awareness and understanding of harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children under the age of 18, it remains a common form of sexual abuse, with police data across Wales since 2020 indicating circa 50% of suspects of CSA were themselves aged under 18 years old²².

Despite there being consistency in legislation and guidance available in Wales regarding responses to children who display HSB, practice realities indicate inconsistency by geography, gender, age, context of harm, agency response and cultural responsiveness, creating somewhat of a post code lottery for children and families affected by this form of child sexual abuse. To more accurately understand HSB prevalence, more consistent and robust data capture is needed to ensure service design and provision is responsive to all forms of child sexual abuse and child sexual abuse recovery. Embedding the voice of those who have needed support to prevent HSB concerns escalating and to better understand both what works and what matters in reducing and preventing further HSB, is of great importance in understanding this complex area of sexual abuse and to improve practice responses.

Diversity among children who display Harmful Sexual behaviour

Children who display HSB are a diverse group, there are a heterogeneity of different kinds of behaviours exhibited by different kinds of children in many varied contexts²³. There are a range of factors that underpin this complexity.

While a child developmental perspective foregrounds the fact that children who have harmed others often have vulnerabilities themselves, it is accepted that HSB by a

²⁰ [Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today](#)

²¹ [We don't tell our teachers - Experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales - Estyn](#)

²² Tarian ROCU and Hydrant Report 2024

²³ [How could a gender-sensitive approach help us to identify and respond to children who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour? - University of Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

child to another child can be every bit as harmful as child sexual abuse perpetrated by adults, regardless of the age or gender of the child who is displaying HSB. Taking a child first individualised approach to HSB responses is most effective in understanding the underlying needs motivating the HSB, as well as wider needs for the child within their family or wider communities.

A DMSS' report, Key messages from research on children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour by Di McNeish and Sara Scott, DMSS Research, second edition, (2023),²⁴ found that older children displaying HSB are mostly boys with histories of adverse childhood experiences. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, gendered disparities by those who display HSB and those harmed by HSB suggest it is a form of gendered sexual violence. HSB however, may be displayed by boys and young men as well as girls and young women, although the issue of gender and gender identity is surprisingly absent from relevant literature. Evidence suggests that when identified, there is a tendency for girls and young women who display HSB to be provided with welfare responses, whereas boys and young men's behaviour is more likely to be seen as a criminal justice issue²⁵. This is particularly the case in adolescence.

There is a marked tendency in both research and practice to see boys in terms of having sexual agency and girls as being sexually passive. Barnardo's 2015 and 2019, highlight that the impact on responses to children of either gender displaying HSB in this context is far reaching. Within Wales there is a strong practice evidence base and emerging research evidence to suggest that children who display HSB may also have their own high prevalence of victim experiences, including experience of child sexual abuse and/or child sexual exploitation.

Barnardo's Cymru data suggests that circa 50% of children who access support from its specialist HSB and child sexual exploitation service have dual concerns and needs relating to both child sexual exploitation and HSB.

Research evidence also points to other similarities between these groups of children, with Hallett et al 'same but different' report highlighting over 65% of children accessing specialist child sexual exploitation or HSB provision in Wales, having multiple trauma and abuse histories, the impact of which was often unreconciled. Developmental disruption for children who display HSB is evidenced in much recent research in this area.

²⁴ [Key messages from research on children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour](#)

²⁵ [The Same but Different? Exploring the Links between Gender, Trauma, Sexual Exploitation and Harmful Sexual Behaviours - Hallett - 2019 - Child Abuse Review - Wiley Online Library](#)

In a thematic review of 117 cases referred to specialist services across the UK,²⁶ Balfe and Hackett found most had experienced care in environments that were chaotic, including erratic living situations, poor family relationships, unstable parental backgrounds, generalised neglect, and abuse, school and social difficulties, physical abuse and high prevalence of exposure to domestic abuse or violence, including sexual harm of them and adults in this context. It is vital then that assessment and recovery support for children who display HSB does not solely include behavioural change programmes.

Assessment and recovery support for children following HSB must also identify the child's own trauma and abuse experiences and seek to include processing the impact of these in any subsequent support the child is offered. Interventions that are relationally based, take account of the child's unique needs and characteristics, are trauma informed and focussed are likely to be most effective in preventing further HSB and increasing the child's best life chances.

Younger children who display HSB, particularly those who are prepubescent must be viewed as a distinct group of children, whose HSB needs to be understood as distinct from older children and adults. Prepubescent children do not understand or experience sexual feelings and arousal in the same way as adolescents. It is more likely that younger children who display HSB will be demonstrating reactive behaviour to their own experiences and exposure to harm or age-inappropriate content and messaging. Their behaviour may be attempts to communicate distress, seek support or connection, or equally it may be mimicking their own experiences. Professionals working with younger children who display HSB must consider what has caused the child's behaviour to exist, what is causing the child's behaviour to continue and the wider safeguarding and recovery needs that will be needed for desistance.

Children with learning and physical disabilities, those with additional learning needs and neurodivergent diagnosis are overrepresented as victims of child sexual abuse as well as those who display HSB. For those whose behaviour is abuse reactive, they may have less understanding that their behaviour is harmful or may be less able to communicate distress caused by their own harm verbally. The additional barriers for this group of children to receive equitable RSE and to relate to others and establish meaningful mutual sexual relationships, may impact on them displaying HSB across the continuum. More focus must be given to this group of children, families and professionals supporting them to promote healthy sexual development across the life course. Additionally, more must be done to ensure professionals are aware of the barriers for this group of children to disclose or signal their own harmful experiences.

²⁶ [The disrupted sociologies of young people with harmful sexual behaviours](#)

Proportionate Responses to HSB

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) displayed by children and young people under 18 can range from inappropriate or problematic behaviour to abusive and violent behaviour. Such is outlined in the HSB pathway informed by Hackett's continuum and developed as part of the previous Welsh Government National Action Plan to prevent Child Sexual Abuse (2019-2022), under Action point 11.

While we must not minimise HSB across its continuum it is vital to properly understand the range of behaviours, as well as the contexts HSB may exist within. In addition, the varying levels of intrusiveness and harm experienced are also important considerations to provide a proportionate response to all children affected by it.

HSB is different from sexual exploration and experimentation, which are normal and an expected part of child and adolescent development. Such may help shape sexual identity and support an understanding of relationships with others. Distinguishing between sexual behaviour that is experimental, normative and expected, or inappropriate, problematic, abusive or violent can be complex and requires professionals to first understand healthy sexual development for children across maturation, in addition to issues of informed consent, power imbalance and abuse of power.

HSB displayed by children that causes professional concern can range from sexualised language and gestures, sexual bullying or harassment, sexual touching without consent, and penetrative acts, including rape. When responding to concerns of a sexual nature by children, robust consideration and assessment by adults involved will be needed to determine the level of concern, as well as what may constitute a proportionate response to the child displaying the harmful behaviour and the child that is harmed by the behaviour. Supplementary questions, used alongside the HSB pathway, to help focus professional thinking, and more accurately assess and respond to the level of concern and safeguarding needs of all children affected, have been developed by Barnardo's Cymru as part of the HSB pathway outlined within the previous National Action Plan (see appendix 3 of this document).

DMSS research found that most sexually abused children do not go on to abuse others, and most displaying harmful behaviour do not commit sexual offences as adults. Although clearly identifying children with the highest level of need and providing the most targeted support to meet these needs is crucial in preventing both escalation of concern and promotes best lifelong chances, including that the child will go on to develop more healthy sexual behaviour and relationships.

Under Barnardo's Child Sexual Abuse Core Priority Programme, a Discovery Project was undertaken (2019) which focussed on 1600 children referred for support in relation to HSB. The report highlighted that 66% of children referred for abusive and

violent sexual behaviour had been known to statutory agencies to have previously engaged in inappropriate or problematic sexual behaviour on average on two previous occasions. Children, parents and carers reported that, whilst welcoming of Barnardo's intervention, they wished there had been earlier intervention prior to the behaviour escalating in severity.

The report also sought the views of statutory stakeholders to reflect on missed opportunities to provide support at an earlier opportunity. This report directly informed the Welsh Government National Action Plan to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse tasking Regional Safeguarding Boards (RSBs) with:

- Developing a clear referral pathway for children displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour to receive an early help assessment.
- Reporting the promotion of information to children/parent/carers on healthy/unhealthy relationships.
- Reporting that referral pathways for Children displaying HSB are in place.

This mirrors National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance across England and Wales. While the pathway exists, there is evidence to suggest it has not been consistently adopted across Wales at this time.

Limited research suggests boys who view child sexual abuse images online without engaging in concerning sexual behaviours offline have less troubled histories than those committing other offenses. There may be a link between online pornography and harmful behaviours. It must be acknowledged that online harm to and by children is not well researched or understood at this point. More research and practice evidence is needed, including hearing from children who have harmed or been harmed in this context, to more robustly understand the issues at play and what is needed to make effective changes to how best to safeguard children online.

There is no specific type of recommended intervention for children who display HSB. There are several studies that seek to explore the effectiveness of approaches such as CBT, relapse prevention approaches. However, the unique needs of this group of children mean that variation of intervention programmes has hampered this. The DMSS report stated that effective interventions should be holistic, child-focused, and involve parents/carers and that prevention education should be long-term, whole-school, and involve children in its development. Public health approaches that challenge gender inequality and patriarchal values are also helpful in tackling harmful sexual behaviour.

Studies undertaken by Barnardo's Cymru, inclusive of the voice of children families and safeguarding partners add to this and suggest that approaches that are multi systemic, experiential, delivered with developmental awareness and consider both

behavioural change alongside trauma processing are likely to be most effective in preventing further HSB and promoting best lifelong chances for all children.

Online sexual abuse

Online sexual abuse is the fastest growing type of abuse according to available data. Given that technology is a key component in most of our daily lives, this is not surprising.

The Child Sexual Abuse Centre of Expertise published ‘Key messages from research on child sexual abuse by adults in online contexts’ in October 2023²⁷. The report notes the following:

In 2023/24, over one-third (39%) of the 101,199 sexual offences against children recorded by the police in England and Wales were imagery offences. Relative to the child population, Welsh forces recorded more child sexual abuse offences than in England²⁸. However, the true extent of child sexual abuse online is likely higher than reported. In 2022, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) detected child sexual abuse material on over a quarter of a million web pages. Most sexual images of children were self-generated, often in their bedrooms, and many children were groomed, deceived, or extorted to produce and share these images.

Surveys have found that children sexually abused in person, with the abuse recorded for sharing online, were commonly abused by a parent, acquaintance, or person in a position of trust, mostly male. Another survey found that adults who pressured children online for sexual activity were often already known to the child offline. Most adults who view, share, or produce sexual images of children are men from White ethnic backgrounds.

Many children abused online struggle to access appropriate support and feel they receive less support than victims of other forms of child sexual abuse. Professionals may blame these victims or feel unable to help due to a lack of expertise in technology. However, detailed knowledge of technology is not required to ask children about their experiences. Relationship-based practice is valuable in addressing children's use of technology.

Child sexual exploitation

In August 2023, the NSPCC published a summary of key issues and learning for improving practice around child sexual exploitation. They reviewed cases involving serious and prolonged child sexual exploitation, as well as unexpected deaths or suicides following such exploitation. They found that sexual exploitation often occurs

²⁷ [Key messages from research on child sexual abuse by adults in online contexts](#)

²⁸ [Child sexual abuse in 2023/24: Trends in official data](#)

alongside other forms of abuse, neglect, and vulnerabilities, such as domestic abuse, going missing, being in care, and having disabilities. Children and young people who are lonely or socially isolated are more vulnerable to exploitation, with LGBTQ+ youth particularly seeking online communities that can be exploited by perpetrators.

Professionals often lacked the knowledge to identify signs early on, missing opportunities to take effective action. While some young people and their families had good relationships with individual practitioners, many felt unheard by services. Children often found it hard to talk about their experiences, and when initial responses were ineffective, they lost confidence in professionals' ability to help. Practitioners sometimes struggled to build trusting relationships that allowed young people to describe their concerns in their own time. Professionals didn't always set aside their own discomfort to create a safe and non-judgemental space for young people to share what had happened to them.

Concerns were sometimes dismissed when a child didn't provide details or "name names," not considering that the child might be too distressed to accept their exploitation or might not understand what sexual exploitation is. Fear or threats of harm towards a young person or their loved ones could prevent the child from talking about their exploitation. Services and professionals often struggled to adapt to the cultural or language needs of children, such as migrant children from minority ethnic groups, making it difficult to identify concerns and provide appropriate support. Signs of child sexual exploitation (CSE) were sometimes mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour, making it harder for the child to share their concerns.

Practitioners didn't always consider that a child or young person might believe their abusers were their 'friends' or 'boy/girlfriends'. For some young people, these relationships fulfilled an emotional need to be loved or a physical need such as shelter. Practitioners sometimes lacked understanding of the importance of peer groups and feelings of 'belonging' to young people.

Exploited young people were sometimes viewed as 'young adults' making their own choices, rather than as children being sexually abused, which reduced opportunities for intervention. Assumptions about a child's level of independence or control based on their appearance led to insufficiently in-depth conversations about consent and sexual exploitation.

Victim-blaming language, such as "meeting/going off with men" or "prostituting themselves," placed responsibility on the child and failed to recognize the coercion and control used by perpetrators. Sexual activity between young people of the same age was perceived as consensual, and the possibility of child sexual exploitation was not always fully explored. Professionals sometimes focused too much on changing the young person's behaviour instead of safeguarding them, promoting their recovery or targeting the perpetrators, allowing the risk of exploitation to continue.

Information about child sexual exploitation was not always effectively recorded or shared, leading to missed opportunities to prevent abuse and support affected children. Practitioners were not always informed about the risk of exploitation, and agencies often lacked up-to-date information on each other's activities, leading to delays in important communication. Incidents experienced by young people were sometimes viewed in isolation, preventing the identification of patterns of risk.

Concerns raised by family members were sometimes overlooked, allowing the risk of exploitation to continue for the young person. Safety plans were sometimes inadequate; they did not include the child's voice or were not shared with the child in a way they understood, failing to consider all available evidence about the young person and their exploitation, which led to underestimating the actual risk they faced.

Group-based sexual exploitation is defined by the Department for Education as occurring when an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate, or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, or for the financial advantage or increased status of the facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur using technology.

Groups are defined as two or more people of any age, connected through formal or informal associations or networks, including friendship groups. Some members of groups engage in co-offending, while others enable each other's offending behaviour.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) recommended that police forces adopt their definition of group based/networks of sexual offending:

“An organised network is characterised by two or more individuals (whether identified or not) who are known to (or associated with) one another and are known to be involved in or to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children. Being involved in the sexual exploitation of children includes introducing them to other individuals for the purpose of exploitation, trafficking a child for the purpose of sexual exploitation, taking payment for sexual activities with a child or allowing their property to be used for sexual activities with a child.”

The audit completed by Baroness Casey and published on 16th June 2025 supports the definition of group-based sexual exploitation of children recommended by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and the typologies of child sexual abuse referred to in Section 1 of this strategy that were developed by the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.

This strategy seeks to address all forms of child sexual abuse therefore, actions arising from the recommendations will be reflected within the final strategy and be delivered through the proposed structure as set out in Section 4 of this document.

2.5 Key messages in relation to preventing and protecting children from child sexual abuse

Victim-survivors voice from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

The Truth Project, which concluded in October 2021, provided more than 6,000 victims and survivors of child sexual abuse the opportunity to share their experiences with the Inquiry and suggest changes. Among the adult victims-survivors who shared their stories:

Most survivors were female, with 70% identifying as such, and 90% came from a white ethnic background. More than half of the survivors were aged between 40 and 59. Nearly half of the survivors lived with a condition that affected their daily lives.

Two-thirds of the survivors were between the ages of 4 and 11 when the abuse started

Over half of the survivors experienced sexual touching, and half experienced penetration. Many also faced physical, psychological, and emotional abuse.

The abuse had significant negative impacts on mental health, with 88% of survivors reporting issues such as depression. Additionally, 53% reported impacts on their relationships, and 41% experienced effects on their school or employment. Most survivors did not disclose the abuse at the time it occurred but did so later. Nearly 1 in 10 shared their experience for the first time through the Truth Project.

The inquiry highlighted the profound and lasting impacts of child sexual abuse and underscored the importance of providing safe spaces for survivors to share their stories and seek support.

Almost three-quarters of the survivors were abused by a family member or someone they knew, with nearly half reporting that the abuse occurred in their family home

More recently the Global Our Voice Survivor Survey (Protect Children, 2024) was published in November 2024, further deepening our understanding of the impact of child sexual abuse. This survey gathered responses from 22,285 adult survivors of child sexual abuse and exploitation from 109 countries and in 29 languages and is the largest survey of its kind to have ever been undertaken. Very specific questions

were asked about demographic information of both victims and perpetrators, the barriers and enablers to disclosure and the consequence of disclosure, the long-term consequences and impact of child sexual abuse and the factors that do and don't facilitate long-term recovery. The Executive Summary states: -

“The survey results highlight the profound and lasting impacts of sexual violence against children, with 84% of survivors reporting long term consequences, including mental health issues and difficulty forming relationships. Many survivors face significant barriers to disclosure with 67% speaking out, but often years or decades after the abuse. Even after disclosing the abuse, 69% of the survivors did not receive support and 89% did not see a police investigation. The findings stress the urgent need for improved support systems, prevention efforts and stronger legal frameworks to better respond to the needs of survivors and prevent abuse.” (Protect Children, 2024, pg 1).

This survey represents a critical contribution to understanding the impact of child sexual abuse by synthesising and reinforcing all prior studies. It provides a platform for the voices of survivors worldwide, making a compelling case for the necessity of improved responses to mental, physical, social, and emotional well-being on a global scale, extending beyond just Wales and England. The survey clearly demonstrates that, despite cultural differences, the effects of child sexual abuse are universally consistent. This insight is vital as we strive to deliver equitable and inclusive services to diverse communities, particularly where research is scarce, and child sexual abuse remains hidden and unacknowledged.

Barriers to Disclosure

There are multiple reasons why children do not disclose abuse, including:

- Not recognising that what they are experiencing is abuse.
- Fearing the response from agencies.
- Fearing recriminations from the perpetrator.
- Fearing the consequences for their loved ones, including the perpetrator.

Allnock and Miller's 2013 report for the NSPCC, "No one noticed, no one heard,"²⁹ states that. These positive experiences had three key features: the young person felt believed, some action was taken to protect them (such as reporting to another professional), and they received emotional support to help them through the process. Young people want someone to notice when things are not right, to ask when they have concerns, and to hear them when they disclose.

Only 10% of disclosures resulted in a positive experience for young people

²⁹ [No one noticed, no one heard | NSPCC Learning](#)

The Child Safeguarding Review Panel's November 2024 report, "I wanted them all to notice: Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment," highlights that practitioners overwhelmingly rely on children to verbally report their abuse before taking action. This reliance has significant implications for preverbal and nonverbal children. Furthermore, children are not always given opportunities to communicate what is happening to them and are often not believed when they do disclose.

Multi agency response to child sexual abuse including identification of abuse

The evidence reviewed by the Child Safeguarding Review Panel considered the response in England only. However, the lessons learned from this report are highly transferable to practice in Wales and echoes other evidence that there is a lack of identification of sexual abuse, lack of consistency in response and that the decision-making process is heavily influenced by the criminal standard of proof.

“This review reveals that the criminal standard of proof pervades decision making throughout the child protection system and beyond, which prevents many children who have suffered sexual abuse receiving the help and protection they need”.

Over a third of reviews featured a family member with a known history of sexual offending or who was known to present some risk of sexual harm

The reviews featured convicted sex offenders and family members who had been previously prosecuted for sexual abuse, including rape of family members, moving into a home with young children without a risk assessment or an effective safeguarding response being put in place. This was often exacerbated by Family Courts and the Judiciary's understanding of child sexual abuse.

Practitioners appeared to lack knowledge and resources to support them in understanding how a history of sexual violence or child sexual abuse offending might translate into risk for children in the family environment.

These echoes findings detailed in the final report of the Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse published in October 2022. The report identifies multiple stories from victim-survivors in which professionals failed to notice that changes in behaviour, physical injuries and other issues were signs that the child was being sexually abused.

People who harm children sexually

The UK Government's Strategy for Tackling Child Abuse (2021-2026) highlights that our understanding of offenders is limited to those who have been identified, likely representing only a small proportion of all offenders.

People who have convictions for child sexual abuse come from all walks of life, age groups, ethnicities, and faiths, making it difficult to distinguish sex offenders from the general population

People who have convictions for child sexual abuse come from all walks of life, age groups, ethnicities, and faiths, making it difficult to distinguish sex offenders from the general population³⁰ Motivations to offend often focus on a sexual interest in children, which is linked to higher re-offense rates. However, other factors also contribute, including sexual motivations such as gratification, interest in illegal activity, problematic attitudes, and using sex as a coping mechanism, as well as non-sexual motivations like financial gain, misogyny, entitlement, power, and control³¹.

Motivations for committing sexual abuse vary widely, including general delinquency, criminal attitudes, anger management issues, intimacy deficits, loneliness, sexual preferences, sexual arousal to violence, hypersexuality, and a desire for power and control³².

Most offenders know their victims, often abusing from a position of trust or power within families, among friends, or in professional roles

Foundation's Stop It Now helpline and online self-help resources regarding their own or someone else's online behaviour. This underscores the widespread nature of the issue and the importance of accessible support services.

Child sexual abuse can be prevented before children get hurt. However, effective child sexual abuse strategies must view '*crime and justice*' as one component part of a whole system response. Prevention and response approaches that are comprehensive and consider all socioecological levels (*individual, interpersonal, community, and societal*) for those both at risk of, or who have perpetrated child sexual abuse are essential. We know the risk factors and we know what works to prevent child sexual abuse: A spectrum of provision is required, ranging from universal/primary prevention services, through to secondary and tertiary interventions.

We know that people who are at risk of committing child sexual abuse usually have sexual thoughts or feelings about children, long before they ever act on them; and many people have sexual thoughts or feelings about children and never act on them. Some people who are at risk of committing child sexual abuse are themselves children and many have other co-occurring problems that require support. Helping

³⁰ [Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy 2021 - GOV.UK](#)

³¹ [Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy 2021 - GOV.UK](#)

³² [Chapter 3: Sex Offender Typologies | Office of Sex Offender Sentencing ...](#)

both adults and children who have these thoughts is important to help prevent child sexual abuse.

One of the challenges we face across society is that child sexual abuse can be difficult to talk about. It is a highly stigmatised topic, so people who have questions or concerns about their thoughts and feelings towards children, face barriers when seeking help. These barriers not only prevent them getting help but also prevent others from intervening and signposting to help and support. Strategies and investment that serve to reduce these barriers to help seeking behaviours are a critical component in the effort to prevent child sexual abuse.

Primary prevention approaches

Talking about child sexual abuse can be difficult for people. However, sexual abuse thrives in secrecy and silence. We need to confront the reality that child sexual abuse does take place. Awareness campaigns that feature information about child sexual abuse and what factors might make sexual abuse more likely should be readily available.

Resources like [What you need to know about child sexual abuse | CSA Centre](#) could be made more freely available to universal audiences. Public awareness campaigns or educational/health generic interventions should seek to help raise awareness around healthy sexual behaviours, consent, healthy relationships, the law and what people should do if they are concerned about their own thoughts or feelings, or someone else's behaviour. Talking about what help can be provided to people at risk of child sexual abuse in public discourse and spaces, will help to reduce barriers to help seeking.

Given that child sexual abuse is more common than people think, it is likely more people will have sexual thoughts and feelings about sexually harming a child too. Raising awareness of these signs and what help is available for people before they act is vital at the universal level. This is because when a person (adult or child) has sexual thoughts or feelings towards children, they will likely be confused about this and feel afraid to speak out about it. Awareness campaigns that promote safe services that offer support to people who are at risk of harming children should reach universal audiences to ensure people can be helped before they sexually harm a child.

Secondary prevention approaches

Secondary approaches target groups or people who present specific risks or characteristics that place them at an increased risk of victimising others or are vulnerable to victimisation themselves. Programmes such as the [Early Intervention](#) at Lucy Faithfull Foundation Wales provide an help for children and families where

there are concerns of child sexual abuse. Tailored support is provided to the person at risk of causing harm. This could be for example a child displaying [harmful sexual behaviour at school](#), children who have shared self-generated sexual material, or family members where there are concerns about sibling sexual abuse.

Trained professionals across services should be resourced and equipped to deal with and refer a person who is at risk of sexually abusing a child to further help and support. Confidential and anonymous helplines, online self-help resources, and programmes are available to those vulnerable or at risk of engaging in child sexual abuse in Wales, through the Lucy Faithfull Foundation Wales ([Stop it Now](#) and for children and young people [Shore](#)). The Lucy Faithful Foundation Wales also provides help and support to family members through [Parents Protect](#) and professionals concerned about someone's behaviour. Some private therapists work across Wales with people who are yet to act on thoughts of sexually abusing a child ([StopSO UK » Tackling Sexual Abuse](#)). However, barriers to help seeking include fears around confidentiality, legal and social consequences, financial costs, a lack of knowledge or confusion about the issue, lack of awareness of the help available.

Much more work is needed to understand what interventions should look like and are effective at tackling all child sexual abuse across all contexts ([Kewley et al, 2023](#)). Given child sexual abuse is most common within the family environment, urgency is needed to identify people in the family who are at risk of sexually harming children and to develop interventions to prevent sexual abuse. The [Signs and indicators of child sexual abuse | CSA Centre](#) can assist practitioners where they have concerns about those around children or environmental factors that might increase the vulnerability to sexual abuse.

Tertiary prevention approaches

Tertiary approaches target people already known to criminal justice or social and health care systems; most safeguarding agencies operate in this space as they begin to work with people after abuse has been identified. Strategies here centre on deterring the re-occurrence of child sexual abuse rather than preventing it in the first place.

The Council of Europe ([2021](#)) declare the most effective way to respond to a person convicted of sexual offending is through a multi-disciplinary approach in which partners share information, expertise and resources with the “common vision of risk management and effective social reintegration”.

In Wales, legislated by the Criminal Justice Act, 2003, [Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements \(MAPPA\)](#)³³ mandates responsible authorities (police, prisons, and

³³ [Multi-agency public protection arrangements \(MAPPA\): Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

probation) to oversee 42 areas across England and Wales and manage people convicted of violent and sexual offences.

MAPPA provides a good practice model for managing people with sexual convictions ([McGuire et al, 2021](#)) and in a most recent review ([Lundrigan and Mann, 2023](#)) proven reoffending rates for people subject to sexual notification requirements were found to be lower than previous estimates. Caution is needed however as these relate to detected rates only and we know far more children are sexually abused each year than are detected ([Kewley and Karsna, 2025](#)).

His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS)³⁴ in Wales provide advice to courts, enforce sentences (custodial, licence and community orders) and protect the public by managing people across Wales with sexual convictions. While prioritising public safety the [HMPPS Approach](#) to managing people convicted of sexual offending integrates risk management with rehabilitation. This ensures safe reintegration of people back into the community while promoting optimism and desistance.

Increased disruption activity is key to the UK Government's strategy for tackling child sexual abuse, which sets out a vision for responding to such abuse in which: "Law enforcement and intelligence services have the capability to disrupt offending at scale, leaving no safe spaces for offenders" ([Home Office, 2021](#):9). However, training for frontline police personnel in relation to child sexual abuse is needed across all police professionals, but for those in specialist roles, understanding [the signs and indicators](#) and appropriate disruption tactics to intervene in child sexual abuse are vital.

The [Child Sexual Offender Disclosure Scheme](#) allows the police to protect a potential victim under the 'right to tell' given risk concerns and for the general public the 'right to ask' for information about a person they have concerns about. Only those with sexual convictions will be subject to disclosure and only when a risk is identified to a specific child in question.

Circles of Support and Accountability³⁵ is a restorative justice-based community intervention in England and Wales, supports high-risk individuals with sexual convictions. It aims to reduce reoffending through support, monitoring, and promoting crime-free living. Evaluations suggest positive outcomes and cost-effectiveness.

³⁴ [The HMPPS Approach to the Management and Rehabilitation of People Convicted of Sexual Offences - GOV.UK](#) ³⁵ [Circles of Support and Accountability Policy Framework - GOV.UK](#)

Preventing child sexual abuse

Research shows that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) significantly increase a child's vulnerability to sexual abuse

ACEs include experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect; witnessing violence in the home or community; and growing up in a household with substance abuse, mental health problems, or instability due to parental separation or incarceration. These experiences can have long-term negative impacts on health, opportunity, and well-being³⁶.

Preventing child sexual abuse in the longer term, involves ensuring children have the best start in life to reduce the likelihood of ACEs occurring or to mitigate their effects if they have already occurred. Early intervention programs play a critical role in this effort by addressing risk factors before they escalate into harmful situations. These programs provide education, resources, and emotional support to families, empowering parents and caregivers to meet their children's needs and break cycles of abuse and neglect³⁷.

Children who have positive relationships with their families, a good level of self-esteem, resilience, and strong attachments to their caregivers are far less likely to experience child sexual abuse³⁸. Building self-esteem, resilience, supportive relationships, and strong attachments can significantly reduce the likelihood of children being sexually abused. Early intervention and supportive environments are essential in fostering these protective factors and preventing abuse.

We aim to raise awareness in all communities in Wales about the harm caused by child sexual abuse, how to identify it, and how to report concerns. This includes building a trauma-informed understanding of child sexual abuse.

In Section 3 of this strategy and Annexe 1 of this document we describe the interrelationship with other policy areas in Welsh Government and UK Government that have responsibility for policy in relation to areas such as trauma informed approaches, childcare, play, education, parenting and others and how these policy areas contribute to preventing sexual abuse and/or reducing the risk of sexual abuse occurring.

³⁶ [About Adverse Childhood Experiences | Adverse Childhood Experiences ...](#)

³⁷ [Child Abuse and Its Lasting Effects on Trust, Relationships, and ...](#)

³⁸ [Why Early Intervention Is Key to Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect](#)

Protecting children and young people whenever there are concerns about child sexual abuse

We need the workforce, including all those who provide activities to children, have regular contact with them, whether in a non-specialist or specialist role, to feel confident about identifying the signs of sexual abuse and in reporting those concerns to police and/or social services.

All practitioners paid or unpaid who have regular contact with adults, children and members of the public need comprehensive child sexual abuse training that is relevant to the level of responsibility for safeguarding they have within their role. The groups of practitioners in paid or unpaid roles that require safeguarding training is best explained in the National Safeguarding Training Standards developed by Social Care Wales (SCW)³⁹.

All practitioners and volunteers need training on the following:

- Indicators/signs of all types of child sexual abuse, including behaviours that need to be explored further as they may indicate sexual abuse
- How to report concerns
- How to respond to disclosures
- How to support the child and family through the process
- Thresholds for referring to children's social care

Practitioners who have more specialised roles, for example, social workers in children's social care, need to have this training and in addition, need training about:

- How to assess and manage risk of sexual abuse
- How to listen to and engage with children and young people who are at risk of sexual abuse or have experienced sexual abuse
- How to support parents and carers through the process of investigation (criminal and/or child protection)

Practitioners need access to specialist advice and resources to support their work with children, families, and potentially the perpetrator of sexual abuse, depending on their role. They require regular reflective supervision and support from their organisations and leaders, including measures to ensure their wellbeing.

Clear guidance is necessary regarding the threshold for child protection interventions, which should be based on a 'balance of probabilities' rather than relying on the criminal threshold. Professionals should be advised that other agencies must be included in strategy discussions and involved at the earliest point to enable agencies to gather a comprehensive picture of the child and family. Additionally, practitioners need support to respond consistently by implementing the

³⁹ [National safeguarding training, learning and... | Social Care Wales](#)

national pathway for responding to child sexual abuse and the national pathway for proportionate responses to harmful sexual behaviour.

We need to ensure that the language used by professionals is not inappropriately conveying responsibility for the abuse on to the child or young person. Children **cannot** consent to their own abuse.

Promoting and encouraging open discussions among children and young people about healthy relationships and providing access to accurate information about child sexual abuse and where to get help is essential. Educating parents, carers, and other adults around children about the harm caused by child sexual abuse, providing accurate information on what child abuse looks like, and signposting them to where they can get help is also important.

There is a significant link between domestic abuse and child sexual abuse. Research indicates that in households where domestic violence occurs, child physical or sexual abuse is also present in approximately 30% to 60% of cases⁴⁰. This overlap suggests that children living in environments where domestic violence is prevalent are at a higher risk of experiencing abuse themselves.

Children who witness domestic abuse can be affected similarly to those who are directly abused. The trauma from witnessing violence including sexual violence, can lead to emotional, psychological, and behavioural issues. Moreover, the pattern of violence in the home often escalates over time, increasing the likelihood that children will eventually become direct victims or be at increased risk of displaying/mimicking harmful behaviours in their own relationships.⁴¹

Factors such as poverty, substance abuse, mental health issues, and social isolation are common in households experiencing both domestic abuse and other forms of child abuse including sexual abuse. These factors exacerbate the risk and impact of abuse, creating a cycle of violence and trauma.

Understanding this link is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. By addressing the broader social, economic, and psychological factors that contribute to both domestic violence and child abuse, we can work towards breaking this cycle and protecting vulnerable children.

We need to understand more about the barriers that prevent disclosure and reporting of concerns and develop ways to overcome these barriers.

⁴⁰ [Child Abuse and Domestic Violence: Connections and Common Factors](#)

⁴¹ [Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Child Abuse - VAWnet](#)

Engaging with individuals who have thoughts of sexually abusing children or have been convicted of such offences to understand their motivations and behaviours will help improve how we assess and manage risk.

Our response to children who have committed sexual offences or have thoughts of sexually abusing other children, needs to be proportionate. Ensuring full implementation of the national pathway of proportionate responses to sexually harmful behaviour will ensure there is a level of consistency across Wales.

2.6 Key messages in relation to support for all those who are affected by child sexual abuse in Wales

Welsh Government commissioned the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse to map the support services available across Wales for all those who are affected by child sexual abuse.

The work was commissioned to assist Welsh Government in identifying non-specialist and specialist services available across Wales and provides an understanding of challenges in this sector.

The study identified a wide range of dedicated and committed services providing support to victim-survivors and their families in Wales through a diverse and often innovative delivery offer.

It identified 78 services supporting victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their families in Wales, with a third (27) based in Wales and the remaining services located in England but available to people living in Wales. Five of the Welsh services focused solely on child sexual abuse, while twelve services – nearly half of all services located in Wales – focused on sexual violence including child sexual abuse. Ten services had a broader remit that included child sexual abuse.

Among the services based in Wales, the vast majority operated at a local level, with nearly half providing support within a single local authority area. Over four-fifths were in the not-for-profit sector. There were more services for children than for adult victims and survivors, and even fewer for parents of sexually abused children.

Despite it being estimated that 10% of the population in Wales having been sexually abused in childhood (equating to 25,000 children every year) those accessing support represent just the tip of the iceberg. To meet this need, each service in Wales would need to support around 11,500 victims and survivors

Some areas had more local provision than others; for example, Cardiff had seven services while Monmouthshire, Torfaen, and Caerphilly had just one. However, with 27 services overall, Wales has greater provision for victims and survivors compared to most of England when considering service provision relative to the estimated number of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. Only two services primarily focused on supporting people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Given that over 10% of the population in Cardiff, Newport, and Swansea are Asian, Black, mixed ethnicity, or White 'other', it is important to improve support available to meet the specific needs of ethnic minority residents in these areas.

Most services reported they could not keep up with demand, resulting in almost all operating with waiting lists for people seeking support. Services highlighted the negative impacts of waiting lists on victims and survivors, particularly on their mental health and subsequent engagement in support. Many services faced challenges around funding due to the short-term nature of grants and contracts. Consequently, some services did not feel fully confident they could sustain their service provision at current levels, which was also attributed to growing demand for support and the competitive nature of funding.

Many services described challenges in maintaining sufficient resources – particularly in terms of recruiting and retaining staff – to support victims and survivors and their families. Additionally, services played an important role in providing training, advice, and guidance to other professionals around child sexual abuse, often without charge and on top of their day-to-day work.

The researchers identified 5 priorities for policy makers, funders and commissioners:

1. Provide funding to support the appropriate training and upskilling of professionals, whether they work in specialist support services or in the wider professional network.

Specialist professionals need training to keep up to date and develop their skills in areas such as different forms of child sexual abuse and ways to support children. Also, given the central role played by non-specialist professionals in statutory agencies when concerns about child sexual abuse arise, training for them is urgently required so there can be an effective, joined-up response to children and adults affected by that abuse.

2. Ensure sufficient funding for services to maintain their current provision and provide timely support.

This should include unrestricted, multi-year funding, enabling services to provide support which meets service users' needs at the time they need it; services should not have to be operating with lengthy waiting lists or in the context of short-term inconsistent funding streams.

3. Working closely with services, provide funding that enables them to expand and develop, so they can meet the diverse needs of their existing service users and new user groups.

This funding might be used by services to extend their reach; to design, develop and evaluate new support, with the involvement of their service users; and to explore different models of support, so they can adapt to service users' individual needs.

4. Provide funding and support in relation to services' infrastructure.

This would enable services to improve their data collection systems and analysis; support and work in cooperation with other professionals, without reducing the support they provide to their own service users; develop and share quality and impact assessment frameworks and tools; and develop and share learning and practice around service user engagement and consultation.

5. Enhance funders' and commissioners' own expertise in funding child sexual abuse support services effectively.

This could include access to information and guidance, training, and resources to support funders and commissioners in carrying out informed needs assessments.

The report highlights that the demand for service provision far exceeds the current availability. Based on the estimate that 10% of people have been sexually abused in childhood, there would be around 12,500 adult victim-survivors for every local service supporting them in Wales.

Most support services are in the not-for-profit sector, which faces instability due to funding methods. Children, young people, parents, carers, and adult victims-survivors are not always receiving the support they need at the right time, hindering effective recovery from child sexual abuse. Without timely access to appropriate support, the impact of the abuse will likely worsen.

To address this, there is a need to consider more sustainable funding arrangements for these services. This involves collaboration with agencies and commissioners currently providing and funding services in Wales, including the Home Office, NHS Wales, local authorities, police, and Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). Additionally, training for practitioners in non-specialist roles who support children, families, and adult victims-survivors should include guidance on how best to support those impacted by child sexual abuse. The Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse has published guidance for commissioners to assist [Funding and commissioning child sexual abuse services | CSA Centre](#).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The evidence base highlights several issues related to people from protected characteristic groups as identified in the Equality Act 2010, including a lack of data on whether children who experience sexual abuse have protected characteristics like disability. This data gap makes it difficult to fully understand the experiences of these children.

Certain groups, such as LGBTQ+ children, those with sensory, physical, and/or learning disabilities, very young children, and children from ethnic minority backgrounds, are significantly more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Interventions should be culturally and developmentally sensitive and be inclusive of the unique needs of children from ethnic minorities, incorporating community-based approaches and involving trusted community leaders. Effective support requires cultural sensitivity and an understanding of the specific challenges faced by these children and their families, who may face additional vulnerabilities due to factors like racism, cultural taboos, and socio-economic disadvantages.

An intersectional approach is crucial, considering how overlapping identities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, disability) impact experiences of abuse and access to support.

LGBTQ+ children are at higher risk of sexual abuse due to discrimination, social isolation, and lack of support. They often face significant barriers to disclosing abuse, including fear of not being believed, stigma, and concerns about their sexual orientation or gender identity being revealed.

The impact of sexual abuse on LGBTQ+ children can be severe, leading to higher rates of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. Effective support for LGBTQ+ children requires an inclusive approach that acknowledges and addresses their unique experiences and challenges, creating safe and affirming environments. Relationships and Sexuality education (RSE) is a mandatory requirement in the new Curriculum for Wales. High quality RSE has an important role to play in supporting learners in recognising healthy, safe relationships and understanding, and developing respect for differences between people. It enables learners to manage risks, express ideas and emotions, develop and maintain healthy relationships, and take on different roles and responsibilities, the learning and experience in this Area can support learners to become healthy, confident individuals. RSE needs to talk about healthy relationships in a way that resonates with all young people regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Disabled children are at a significantly higher risk of sexual abuse compared to their non-disabled peers, especially those with intellectual or mental health disabilities. These children face additional barriers to reporting abuse, such as communication

difficulties, dependency on caregivers (who may be the abusers), and a lack of accessible reporting mechanisms.

There is a notable lack of victim services and support tailored to meet the unique needs of disabled children, leading to long-term negative effects like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. Effective interventions must be inclusive, ensuring accessibility and providing specialised training for those working with these children. Raising awareness and providing training for caregivers, educators, and professionals about the signs of abuse and the specific vulnerabilities of children with disabilities is crucial for prevention and early intervention.

Non-verbal children are at higher risk of sexual abuse due to their communication challenges, making it easier for abusers to exploit them. They face significant barriers in disclosing abuse, as they may lack the means to communicate what has happened, and their attempts to express distress might be misunderstood or overlooked. These children often rely heavily on caregivers for their daily needs, increasing their vulnerability if the caregiver is the abuser.

Effective support for non-verbal children requires specialised approaches, including alternative communication methods (e.g., sign language, communication devices) and trained professionals who can recognise and respond to signs of abuse. Caregivers, educators, and professionals must be vigilant for non-verbal signs of distress or changes in behaviour that could indicate abuse.

Babies and infants are extremely vulnerable to sexual abuse due to their complete dependence on caregivers and inability to communicate. Detecting sexual abuse in this age group is particularly challenging, as signs may be subtle and easily mistaken for other issues. Medical professionals and caregivers need to be vigilant for any unusual signs or symptoms.

The impact of sexual abuse on babies and infants can be profound and long-lasting, affecting their physical, emotional, and psychological development. Early intervention is crucial to mitigate the long-term effects of abuse, including medical treatment, psychological support, and ensuring the child's safety. Professionals working with this age group require specialised training to recognise and respond to signs of abuse effectively. Support should also be available to non-abusive/protective parents and carers to support their child through recovery and build resilience.

Section 3: Strategic Objectives and Priority Actions

During the engagement work we have undertaken in 2023 and 2024 with key stakeholders we have co-produced four strategic objectives:

- Preventing child sexual abuse
- Protecting children when there are concerns about child sexual abuse
- Supporting children and adults who are affected by child sexual abuse
- Supporting adult victims-survivors of child sexual abuse

For each objective we co-produced short-term, medium term and long-term actions we need to undertake. Our thinking is set out below under each of the four strategic objectives. Key delivery partners have also been identified under each of the objectives.

Since this engagement work was completed, we have identified another area that we need to tackle as a priority: developing a core data set for child sexual abuse. This is one of the recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and needs to encompass multiple stakeholders with various specialisms for example, data collection and analysis. This is an incredibly complex task given the number of agencies involved, the data systems used by each and the multiple reporting pathways. This work will include mapping the information available about people who have sexual convictions against children.

For these reasons, we believe that we need a dedicated workstream group comprising representation from Welsh Government, senior leaders from organisations and those who have specialist knowledge about data collection, analysis and reporting methodologies to progress this work further.

3.1 Preventing child sexual abuse

Long term outcomes we want to achieve	Actions we will take to achieve these long-term outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Create and maintain a culture of openness and understanding where everyone feels safe and confident to talk about all forms of child sexual abuse.2. Children and young people and adults around them are empowered to keep children safe from sexual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a comprehensive communications plan for awareness-raising activities targeting children, parents, caregivers, volunteers, and professionals.• Centralise and map existing resources for children, young people, parents, carers, and communities to ensure easy access.• Identify resource gaps and create free, inclusive materials in various media and languages, covering all forms of child sexual abuse.

<p>abuse and know how to report concerns.</p> <p>3. Communities recognise, respond and report concerns of child sexual abuse.</p> <p>4. There is an effective response to those who sexually abuse children, or who have thoughts of sexually abusing children that prevents further harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide adults in Wales with accurate information on child sexual abuse, healthy relationships, and sex education. • Empower communities to discuss, identify, and report child sexual abuse confidently. • Increase awareness of children's vulnerabilities to sexual abuse due to unresolved trauma and adversity. • Host community events on preventing child sexual abuse and keeping children safe. • Consult with children and young people to create safer spaces in homes, parks, schools, and clubs. • Support individuals who have thoughts of sexually abusing children to prevent harm occurring. • Support individuals who have been convicted of causing sexual harm to children to prevent harm recurring. • Offer services and information to deter young people from causing sexual harm to others. • Engage with the Violence Prevention Units and Community Safety Partnerships across Wales and map the relevant actions from their plans that will contribute to this strategy's vision. • Promote appropriate language use around child sexual abuse, avoiding victim-blaming. • Ensure parents and carers can identify all forms of child sexual abuse, including intrafamilial, sibling, harmful sexual behaviour, exploitation, and online abuse. • Raise awareness and build a trauma-informed culture within Welsh communities. • Inform parents and carers about support resources for children who have experienced or are at risk of sexual abuse. • Educate all children in Wales about healthy relationships, safety, and reporting concerns.
<p>Priority actions for 2025-2028</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with relevant policy leads in Welsh Government who have cross cutting priorities and contribute to the achievement of this objective, for example, online safety. • Engage with the Violence Prevention Units and Community Safety Partnerships across Wales and map the relevant actions from their plans that will contribute to this strategy's vision 	

- Develop a communication and engagement plan that explains how we will meet the awareness raising needs of all audiences.
- Map and centralise existing resources for all audiences and identify any gaps.
- Develop and launch a national campaign to raise awareness about the prevalence of child sexual abuse, the harm it causes, how to identify sexual abuse and report concerns.
- Implement the pathway for proportionate responses to harmful sexual behaviour commissioned by and developed for Welsh Government during the previous national action plan.

Priority actions for 2029-2032

- Develop further resources required to raise awareness with target audiences.
- Explore methods for engaging with communities and map existing engagement opportunities to ensure that all communities have an equitable offer.
- Work with and support services that help prevent sexual offending such as probation, police and youth justice.
- Provide services and information to work with young people to deter sexual harm to other children.
- Evaluate the impact of the implementation of the national pathway for proportionate responses to harmful sexual behaviour.

Priority actions for 2033-2035

- Consult with children and young people and adult victim-survivors about how to create safer spaces where they spend time together for example home, parks, schools, clubs and online.
- Develop and launch a national campaign encouraging people how to get support if they are worried about their thoughts and behaviour related to child sexual abuse.

Key delivery partners for this objective are:

- Policy areas in Welsh Government such as online safety and modern slavery
- Community leaders
- Community services
- Third sector organisations
- Statutory organisations such as health, police and probation
- Regional Safeguarding Boards
- National Independent Safeguarding Board

There are some overlaps between the Preventing and Responding objectives in terms of the ‘audiences’ we need to raise awareness with/ensure have the required level of training. To ensure clarity, we have separated these out.

Under the prevention strand we will target professionals and volunteers who provide activities to, or encounter children and young people during their work but do not

have any specialist role in safeguarding children. This could include volunteers in a church Sunday school group, football coaches, play and childcare settings that fall outside of the registration process and others.

Under the Responding objective we will focus on those professionals who have an organisational duty to report concerns about abuse and neglect (local authorities and other key partners such as police, health, education) and professionals like social workers in children's services, designated safeguarding leads in health and education, and others who have a specialist role in responding to child sexual abuse.

3.2 Protecting children and young people whenever there are concerns of child sexual abuse

Long term outcomes we want to achieve	Actions we will take to achieve these long-term outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All professionals have child sexual abuse training at a level appropriate to their roles and can identify and respond to sexual abuse, can support children and their families and assess and manage risks associated with sexual abuse. 2. Parents and carers receive timely support if their child is at risk of child sexual abuse, is or has been sexually abused or is engaging in harmful sexual behaviour. 3. There is a consistent multi-agency response to concerns of child sexual abuse across Wales. 4. Professionals can access specialist advice to support their work with children, families and adult victims-survivors. 5. Children and young people know they will be seen, heard and understood if 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the review being undertaken by Welsh Government of the current effectiveness of the mandatory organisational duty to report and the consideration of mandating duties to report on individuals. • Strengthen existing guidance for practitioners about all types of child sexual abuse and the risk indicators associated with people who are at risk of sexually abusing children. • Work with Regional Safeguarding Boards to embed a child sexual abuse multi-agency response pathway across Wales. • Map existing resources for professionals, centralise access to these and identify and address gaps. • Explore the potential for establishing expert practitioners (virtual hubs) across Wales and what funding would be required to establish. • Scope the added value of NSPCC snap shots to assist this and what funding would be required. • Encourage children and young people in Wales to confidently report any risk or experience of sexual abuse to a trusted person by providing clear information about what steps will be taken if they disclose to a trusted adult via awareness raising, education, informative, accessible materials. • Revise and re-launch the statutory Welsh Government guidance Working Together to Safeguard People Volume 7 – Safeguarding Children from Child Sexual Exploitation.

they are being sexually abused or feel at risk of child sexual abuse	
<p>Priority actions for 2025-2028</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the review of the current effectiveness of the mandatory organisational duty to report and the consideration of mandating duties to report on individuals. • Map and centralise existing resources to support professionals in the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse. • Launch and embed a national pathway for the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse. • Welsh Government to host the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse Roadshows in North and South Wales that will focus on the first year of the strategy. • Develop and cost a proposal for establishing virtual expert hubs in Wales including the delivery of an All-Wales Lead Practitioner Programme. • Revise and re-launch the statutory Welsh Government guidance Working Together to Safeguard People Volume 7 – Safeguarding Children from Child Sexual Exploitation. 	
<p>Priority actions for 2029-2032</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop/source training, supervision, and reflective practice materials to support practitioners working with those affected by child sexual abuse centralise to ensure they are accessible to those who need them. • Develop promotion plan for centralised resources and begin to track/monitor usage. • Commission research to understand the barriers facing children from marginalised communities and recommendations for action required to overcome them. • Develop and deliver an annual conference for professionals in 2029 that focuses on the first three years of the strategy. • Monitor the progress being made with the implementation of the national pathway for child sexual abuse 	
<p>Priority actions identified for 2033-2035</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review pilots of multi-agency child protection hubs in England to inform further development in Wales. • Promotion and dissemination of youth-facing resources on child sexual abuse barriers, reporting etc and the research/recommendations for actions on overcoming barriers facing children from marginalised communities. • Evaluate the outcomes of the implementation of the national pathway for the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse. • Evaluate the implementation of the national pathway for responding to child sexual abuse. • Evaluate the outcomes from the implementation of the training framework. 	

Key delivery partners for this objective are:

- Regional Safeguarding Boards
- Wales Safeguarding Procedures Project Board
- National Independent Safeguarding Board
- Statutory organisations such as children’s social care, police, health and education

3.3 Supporting children and families affected by child sexual abuse

Long term outcomes we want to achieve	Actions we will take to achieve these long-term outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All children and young people who have been affected by child sexual abuse will have access to appropriate and timely support that meets their needs. 2. All services and practitioners can provide the right support at the right time to children, young people and those around them who have been affected by child sexual abuse. 3. Families and those around children and young people who have been affected by child sexual abuse have access to support that meets their needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure there is a clear and detailed understanding of service provision for children and young people affected by all types of child sexual abuse across Wales. • Ensure access to specialist counselling and support services for children and young people affected by child sexual abuse including harmful sexual behaviour, facilitating their healing and recovery when necessary. • Raise awareness of support services and promote the importance of the voluntary sector in providing recovery, counselling, and support to children and young people affected by child sexual abuse. • Ensure that individuals working with children and young people in Wales, whether in general or specialised services, possess the knowledge, confidence, and skills relevant to their roles to support those affected by child sexual abuse (see above, this will be considered as part of the development of the training framework). • Encourage those working with children affected by sexual abuse to use trauma-informed practices in line with the Trauma Informed Framework. • Incorporate families and caregivers affected by child sexual abuse into the support planning process. • Support families and carers in identifying and managing the effects of child sexual abuse with a trauma-informed approach and develop their understanding of their children’s and their own trauma needs. • Support families and carers to manage the effects of sibling sexual abuse with a trauma-informed approach. • Ensure children and families can access specialist support when a family member is arrested for child sexual abuse, including online offences.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop guidance to enable families and carers to access legal support and advice to enable them to navigate the family and criminal court systems following child sexual abuse. • Further understand the experiences of families and carers affected by child sexual abuse in Wales and develop resources and psychoeducation tools to be used consistently with families as the first step in the process of support.
<p>Priorities identified for 2025-2028</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the commissioned ‘Support Matters’ in Wales work and other mapping information produced by the Sexual Assault Services programme and Traumatic Stress Wales, identify a detailed picture of service provision for those affected by child sexual abuse (including harmful sexual behaviour and child sexual exploitation) for children and families and provide a report to Welsh Government. • Engage with commissioners to consider how we establish a more sustainable model for support services. • Engage with relevant policy leads who have cross cutting priorities and contribute to the achievement of this objective, for example, Sexual Assault Referral Centres and Traumatic Stress Wales. 	
<p>Priorities identified for 2029-2032</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commission research to further understand the experiences of families and carers affected by child sexual abuse in Wales and how we can better promote a whole family trauma-informed approach to support. • Develop or source resources and psychoeducation tools and used consistently with families as the first step in the process of support. • Develop guidance to enable families and carers to access legal support and advice to enable them to navigate the family and criminal court systems following child sexual abuse. 	
<p>Priorities identified for 2032-2035</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralise resources and psychoeducation tools and promote awareness of the resources available. • Evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the national pathway for harmful sexual behaviour. • Promote and raise awareness of the guidance for families and carers about the criminal and family court systems. 	
<p>Key deliver partners for this objective are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy areas in Welsh Government such as Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and their Sexual Assault workstream 	

- Third sector organisations
- Statutory organisations such as children’s social care, health and police
- Regional Safeguarding Boards
- Other providers and commissioners of support services

3.4 Supporting adult victim-survivors

Long term outcomes we want to achieve	Actions we will take to achieve these long-term outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating and maintaining a culture of openness and understanding, and an environment where adults feel safe and confident to talk about sexual abuse that happened to them when they were children. 2. All young people and their families affected by sexual abuse are given access to support across their transition into adulthood and beyond. 3. All services and practitioners provide the right support at the right time to adults who have been affected by sexual abuse as children or young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage adults who experienced sexual abuse to share their stories. • Ensure professionals working with children, families, and adults in Wales understand the long-term impact of child sexual abuse. • Recognise adolescent development needs and risks related to sexual abuse in policies and practices. • Provide a consistent response to sexually abused adolescents across Wales for support and safeguarding. • Ensure young people aged 18-25 affected by child sexual abuse can access appropriate care through homelessness, substance misuse, criminal justice, and mental health services. • Ensure adult survivors of child sexual abuse in Wales can access counselling and related support services that will help with healing and recovery when needed • Increase visibility and recognition of support services for adult survivors of child sexual abuse, emphasising the role of the voluntary sector in recovery and counselling. • Clarify the responsibilities of adult social care under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 regarding adult survivors of child sexual abuse. • Ensure access to support services for individuals who displayed harmful sexual behaviour as children, focusing on building protective factors during their transition to adulthood and beyond. • Set up a Routine Enquiry project group to develop and roll out training to help all practitioners to routinely ask about child sexual abuse with adults. • Development of guidance for Local Authorities about eligibility criteria, care and support for adult survivors of child sexual abuse, including situational capacity. • Improve the response for young people and their families affected by all forms of sexual abuse and better

	<p>support the transition into adulthood and adult life with services that meet their specific support needs. To include the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop forums across Wales for adults with lived experience of child sexual abuse so that the voice of survivors is heard and listened to and is a mechanism for meaningful engagement b. Set up regional lived experience groups specifically for adolescents, including those in rural parts of Wales. c. Development and implementation of an All-Wales pathway specifically for adolescents who have experienced child sexual abuse. d. Explore the Manchester University Toolkit for using the Mental Capacity Act with adolescents.
<p>Priority actions for 2025-2028</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a Routine Enquiry project group to develop and roll out training to help all practitioners to routinely ask about child sexual abuse with adults. • Develop guidance for local authorities about eligibility criteria, care and support for adult survivors of child sexual abuse, including situational capacity. • Use the commissioned ‘Support Matters’ in Wales work and other mapping information produced by the Sexual Assault Services programme and Traumatic Stress Wales, to identify a detailed picture of service provision for those affected by child sexual abuse (including harmful sexual behaviour and child sexual exploitation). • Identify the gaps in service provision for adult victim-survivors of child sexual abuse in Wales and undertake a needs analysis which will form recommendations for Welsh Government. 	
<p>Priority actions for 2029-2031</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Victim-Survivors Advisory Group (to be established to support deliver of this strategy) to develop forums across Wales for adults with lived experience of child sexual abuse so that the voice of survivors is heard and listened to and there is a mechanism for meaningful engagement • Engage with relevant policy leads who have cross cutting priorities and contribute to the achievement of this objective, for example, SARCs and Traumatic Stress Wales. 	
<p>Priority actions for 2032-2035</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the response for young people and their families affected by all forms of sexual abuse and better support the transition into adulthood and adult life with services that meet their specific support needs. 	

Key delivery partners for this objective are:

- Policy areas in Welsh Government such as Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and their Sexual Assault workstream
- Third sector organisations
- Statutory organisations such as children’s social care, adult social care, health and police
- Regional Safeguarding Boards
- Other providers and commissioners of support services

3.5 Priority - Developing a core data set for child sexual abuse

Long term outcomes we want to achieve	Actions we will take to achieve these long-term outcomes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is an agreed core data set that enables analysis at a national level of the scope and prevalence of child sexual abuse in Wales. 2. The core data set is used to monitor and evaluate the impact this strategy is having in key areas. 3. The core data set informs the work taking place under this strategy and enables us to prioritise and focus resources most effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map current data collected, who by, how frequently and where this is reported to. • Analyse what current data sets tells us and map gaps in our knowledge. • Refine existing data measures and develop new data measures that meet the identified gaps. • Use the information gathered to inform delivery of the strategy and to shape future policy and delivery.
<p>Priority actions for 2025-2028</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a workstream group comprising representation from the statutory and third sector, academics, specialist data collection, development and analysis experts. • Map current data and identify any gaps in our knowledge base. • Complete an analysis of the gaps identified and provide a report to Welsh Government. 	
<p>Priority actions for 2029-2032</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refine current measures where required. • Explore other measures that would further inform policy and practice and consider how these could be developed and embedded. • Pilot collection of any new measures. 	

Priority actions for 2033 to 2035

- Review and refine measures
- Contribute to the evaluation of the impact of the strategy on outcomes for people in Wales.

Key delivery partners for this objective are:

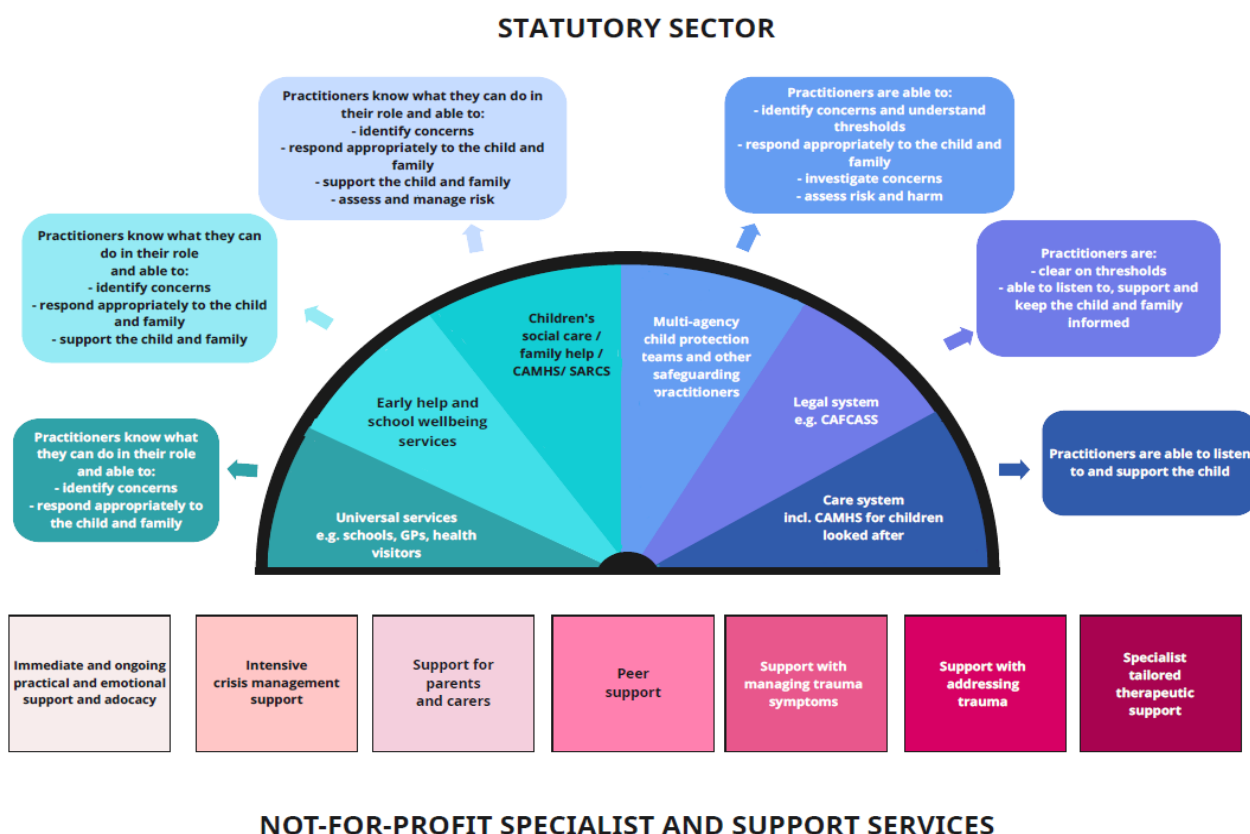
- Data collection and analysis specialists from within agencies and Welsh Government
- National Independent Safeguarding Board (as this is related to the work the Board has commissioned Manchester Metropolitan University to do with Regional Safeguarding Boards)
- Regional Safeguarding Boards
- Statutory organisations such as children's social care, police and health

3.6 Priority – Develop and embed a whole system response and approach to child sexual abuse across Wales

In Year one of the strategy, we will be establishing two priority action groups that will develop and implement firstly, a national approach to the implementation of an evidence-based child sexual abuse pathway and also a national training framework for child sexual abuse. Both the CSA Response Pathway and the training framework are a cross-cutting priority actions of the four strategic aims of the strategy and will offer the mechanism to deliver a consistent response to child sexual abuse and training about indicators, identification, reporting, responding to disclosures, types of child sexual abuse and how to support children, families and adult victim-survivors to recover from abuse and therefore encompasses the four strategic objectives.

The priority action group will be chaired by the Head of Safeguarding and Advocacy, Welsh Government and include representation from Regional Safeguarding Boards, statutory and third sector organisations, Social Care Wales, the chairs of the four workstream groups and relevant policy leads from Welsh Government.

Whole system approach to child sexual abuse training



3.7 Priority - Implement a national pathway for Child Sexual Abuse

In Year one of the strategy, we will be establishing a priority action group that will develop and implement a national pathway for child sexual abuse. This priority action group will be chaired by the Head of Safeguarding and Advocacy, Welsh Government and include representation from Regional Safeguarding Boards, statutory and third sector organisations and the chairs of the four workstream groups.

Developing a consistent response to child sexual abuse across Wales requires leadership and direction from Welsh Government, supported by a national training framework and a core data set.

To achieve this, Welsh Government will lead these programmes of work to ensure consistent planning and implementation.

Section 4: Delivering the strategy: a whole system approach

4.1 A whole system approach

Addressing child sexual abuse effectively requires a collaborative approach. To achieve our vision, we need to work across governments, within Welsh Government, with the National Independent Safeguarding Board, Regional Safeguarding Boards and their constituent partners, third sector organisations, adult victim-survivors, children and young people, parents and carers and communities.

To prevent and respond effectively to child sexual abuse, it is vital we are cognisant of the work being done to ensure children's rights to life, education and freedom from abuse, neglect and other harms and are supported to build resilience as this work will support us to achieve our long-term vision.

There are several factors that contribute to increased children being more vulnerable to sexual abuse. These include having more than one adverse childhood experience; living in poverty; not attending or not attaining in education; lack of family support; living outside families, for example, being in care; and others.

These policy areas are fundamentally important in creating a society in which children are well supported, and any adverse childhood experiences are prevented or mitigated, making an indirect, though nevertheless, important contribution to the achievement of our vision.

Some policy areas such as Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) contribute directly to preventing child sexual abuse by tackling misogynistic views and encouraging a focus on healthy relationships and by supporting victim-survivors of sexual violence. People who have experienced child sexual abuse will have a higher risk of experiencing sexual violence in relationships.

Appendix 1 of this document explains the interrelationships between this strategy and other Government strategies, plans and workstream/policy areas.

Cross cutting plans include:

- Anti-Racist Action Plan
- LGBTQ+ Action Plan
- Disabled People's Rights Plan
- Gender Equality Plan

Key policy areas listed below will all have representation on an internal advisory group to be established under this strategy.

Crime and Justice

The criminal justice system in Wales (including courts, police, probation and prison services) are non-devolved and so responsibility rests with the UK parliament and Government. Current legislation relevant to child sexual abuse includes the following:

Sexual Offences Act 2003 is the principal legislation governing sexual offences in England and Wales. It defines and criminalises various sexual offences. The Act also includes provisions for the notification requirements of people with sexual convictions and civil orders to manage the risk posed by people with sexual convictions.

Part 2 of the Act concerns the management of people with sexual convictions. It establishes:

- **Notification Requirements:** Convicted sexual offenders must regularly inform the police of personal details, including their address, travel plans, and any changes to their circumstances.
- **Sexual Harm Prevention Orders (SHPOs):** These civil orders can impose restrictions on individuals to prevent sexual harm, such as limiting internet use or unsupervised contact with minors.
- **Sexual Risk Orders (SROs):** Applicable to individuals who have not been convicted but are deemed to pose a risk of sexual harm, allowing for proactive intervention.

These measures enable law enforcement to monitor and manage offenders effectively within the community.

Malicious Communications Act 1988 and Communications Act 2003 makes it an offence to send (by means of a public electronic communications network) indecent, offensive, or threatening letters, a message or other matter, electronic communications, or other articles that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene, or menacing character with the intent to cause distress or anxiety.

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 strengthens notification requirements. It introduces more rigorous obligations for offenders to report certain activities and changes in their circumstances and law enforcement agencies are granted broader authority to monitor and enforce compliance among people subjected to notification requirements.

Criminal Justice Act 2003 established Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA). MAPPA provides a framework for various agencies, including police, probation services, and social services, to collaborate in assessing

and managing the risks posed by sexual and violent offenders. This coordinated approach ensures that appropriate measures are in place to protect the public.

The Crime and Policing Bill introduces a range of measures aimed at strengthening the response to child sexual abuse and other sexual crimes. Key provisions include enshrining two recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse into law: classifying grooming as a statutory aggravating factor in child sex offence sentencing and creating a legal obligation for designated individuals to report suspected abuse (the latter applying in England only). The bill also addresses offences related to the production and possession of child sexual abuse material and seeks to formalise ‘Sarah’s Law’ by giving the child sex offender disclosure scheme a statutory basis. Additional offences concerning voyeurism and the non-consensual taking of intimate images are also proposed.

Welsh Government will be fully engaged with the National Inquiry recommended in Baroness Casey’s audit and accepted by the UK Government, to examine group-based sexual exploitation of children and young people. Whilst many of the recommendations in the report are for reserved areas of the criminal justice system, the response to the sexual exploitation of children is a multi-agency one including areas that are devolved to Welsh Government such as education, health and social services.

We will also continue working with UK Government departments to embed the recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

Additionally, within Welsh Government, we work with the crime and justice team and policing in Wales regarding prevention and protection actions being taken by police and courts, and legislation relating to child sexual abuse that covers England and Wales.

Modern slavery

Child sexual exploitation is reserved to UK Government and workstreams sit within both the Department for Health and Social Care and the Home Office. In Welsh Government the Safeguarding and Advocacy team and the Modern Slavery team work together regarding our response to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation. People can be victims of one or both types of exploitation. Modern slavery also covers the sexual exploitation of adults, criminal exploitation of adults, domestic servitude, forced labour and trafficking for any of these purposes.

Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)

Our evidence base points strongly to the association between violence against women, domestic abuse, sexual violence and child sexual abuse.

The objectives and aspirations of the VAWDASV blueprint and strategy contributes directly with the objectives and aspirations of this strategy. For example, challenging attitudes to sexual violence; increasing awareness in children, young people and adults of the importance of safe, equal and healthy relationships and empowering them to positive personal choices; ensuring professionals are trained to provide effective, timely and appropriate responses to victims and survivors; and to provide all victims with equal access to appropriately resourced, high quality, needs-led, strength-based, inter-sectional and responsive services across Wales.

The Safeguarding and Advocacy team authoring this draft strategy are represented on the Children and Young People's workstream group and the Older People's workstream group of the VAWDASV Blueprint.

Online Safety

Our evidence base demonstrates that this is a rapidly expanding and changing landscape in which children and young people are experiencing child sexual abuse.

[Enhancing digital resilience in education: An action plan to protect children and young people online - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#) aims to equip our children and young people with excellent knowledge, skills and strategies in these areas and to recognise when to access help and support and where to find it. It explains that Welsh Government will continue to focus on three key areas: online safety, cyber resilience and data protection.

The team are raising awareness of emerging issues, which includes the rapid increase in AI-generated Child Sexual Abuse Materials (CSAM) through new Generative AI: Keeping learners safe online safeguarding guidance for schools (due to be published Autumn 2024). The Welsh Government and UKCIS '[Responding to incidents of sharing nudes: safeguarding and supporting children and young people](#)' guidance has been updated in 2024 to reflect an increase in sextortion cases and AI-generated images targeting children under 18. Developing professional learning and sharing resources to support education practitioners with digital safeguarding issues is an ongoing priority.

The team have also developed a range of online safety resources for children and young people, parents and carers and professionals that can be accessed free of charge on the Hwb website [Keeping safe online - Hwb](#). One of the main challenges faced by those adults who support and keep children safe is their understanding of technology, how it can be used to abuse children sexually and how up to date their understanding is.

The team have developed a suite of teaching materials for delivery in schools and work with schools to ensure they have robust online safety mechanisms in place.

The team are liaising with UK Government in respect of the Online Safety Act. We will be working closely with this team to deliver elements of this strategy.

The Online Safety Act 2023 addresses the challenges posed by digital technologies in the context of sexual offences. It makes it an offence to 'cyberflash', send unsolicited sexual images electronically, thereby expanding the scope of offences that can lead to registration and monitoring. There are several other pieces of legislation regarding the taking, making, distribution, and possession of indecent images of children/ pseudo-photographs, extreme pornographic images, "revenge porn" including Protection of Children Act 1978; Criminal Justice Act 1988; Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008; Criminal Justice and Courts Act 2015; Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

Education

School and other educational settings play a critical role in building resilience in children and young people that reduces vulnerability, thereby reducing the risk of sexual abuse taking place. There are several plans and strategies that set out the expectations Welsh Government has that schools and other settings will support families and promote the welfare of children and young people.

In November 2022, Welsh Government published [Community Focused Schools \(CFS\) Guidance](#) advising schools how they can engage with families, communities and multi-agencies to support the needs of their learners and families and benefit the wider community. This enables children and families to access support to prevent issues from escalating. Most schools now have a Family Engagement Officer or similar and this role provides considerable support and assists families to access resources to address poverty, provide parenting support and signpost to other community services such as the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Our evidence base demonstrates that wider public health approaches to misogyny can have a significant impact on behaviours that are or could become harmful sexually. The [Peer-on-peer sexual harassment in education settings: action plan \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#) published in January 2024, outlines the actions the Welsh Government, working with partners, will undertake to prevent and respond to the issue of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and [harmful sexual behaviour \(HSB\) \(www.safeguarding.wales\)](#) in education settings.

Evidence shows that girls and young women are the primary target of peer-on-peer sexual harassment, with LGBTQ+ learners and learners with ALN also at high risk. The action plan aims to reflect the nature of sexual harassment as an intersectional

issue and, in doing so, meet the needs of different groups of learners such as Black and minority ethnic, LGBTQ+, neurodiverse and disabled learners. The voice of young people is at the core of designing the response to peer-on-peer sexual harassment.

Relationships and Sexuality education (RSE) is a mandatory requirement in the new Curriculum for Wales. It plays an important role in supporting learners in recognising healthy, safe relationships and understanding, and developing respect for differences between people. It enables learners to manage risks, express ideas and emotions, develop and maintain healthy relationships, and take on different roles and responsibilities, the learning and experience in this area can support learners to become healthy, confident individuals.

One strand of the RSE Code is focussed on 'Empowerment, safety and respect' including:

- learners' rights to safety and protection and freedom from harm and discrimination
- how and where to seek information, help and support
- how to support and advocate for the rights, fair treatment and respect of all.

The [Enhancing digital resilience in education: An action plan to protect children and young people online - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#) sets out the work that Welsh Government are undertaking to increase safety online for children, young people, parents and carers and professionals. Our evidence base demonstrates that online sexual abuse is the largest growing type of child sexual abuse.

The Hwb team have developed a substantial suite of supporting materials for children, parents and carers and professionals (not just professionals in education settings).

They are raising awareness of emerging issues, including the rapid increase in AI-generated child sexual abuse through new Generative AI. They have recently published updated guidance for schools '[Responding to incidents of sharing nudes: safeguarding and supporting children and young people](#)' that reflects an increase in sextortion cases and AI-generated images targeting children under 18. Developing professional learning and sharing resources to support practitioners with digital safeguarding issues is an ongoing priority.

School age children spend a considerable portion of their lives in educational settings therefore the Education policy areas within Welsh Government, schools and other educational settings have a significant role to play in safeguarding children from all forms of abuse.

Local authorities and key partners have a legal duty to report any concerns they have that a child may be experiencing or are at risk of experiencing, abuse, neglect or harm.

Welsh Government guidance [Keeping Learners Safe \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/keeping-learners-safe) is intended for all those working with children and young people in an education setting or related agency who would benefit from understanding the process for safeguarding in schools, and the wider system.

The guidance sets out the robust safeguarding measures schools and other educational settings engaged with the provision of education services to children and young people must put in place. For example, having a Designated Safeguarding Lead, safe recruitment practices and safeguarding training. It also includes guidance about how to respond to concerns about a professional.

Schools and education settings also provide support to children and young people around their mental health and wellbeing, mitigating adverse childhood experiences and supporting their recovery from trauma.

The Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being [WG42005 \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/wg42005) published in 2021 sets out how schools and local authorities are required to have regard to the Framework when developing action plans, strategies and other policies that impact on the well-being of learners, staff and others working within the school environment.

Welsh Government has provided £13.6m in the current year to support implementation of the Framework, which includes funding to support those children and young people requiring more specialist interventions to ensure they receive an appropriate response in a timely manner (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in-reach); and funding to support improvements in and an expansion of the school and community based counselling service, which sees around 12,500 children and young people each year.

Childcare and Play

Children benefit hugely from engaging in high quality childcare and play activities, this can promote equality of opportunity, a child's cognitive development, their social skills and wellbeing, build resilience and reduce/mitigate adverse childhood experiences.

The childcare and play workforce are critical partners in keeping children safe from abuse. They spend considerable periods of time with children and young people and are therefore well placed to build trusting relationships and safe spaces for children to disclose harm.

The National Minimum Standards for Childcare have been reviewed and the safeguarding information strengthened. We have been contributing to the review of the Exceptions Order which defines what settings will be subject to regulation and inspection and those that will not.

The Ministerial Review of Play recommends that Welsh Government ensure there were adequate safeguarding arrangements in place in playwork settings. We have worked with the play sector to review the Code of Safeguarding Practice, non-statutory guidance for individuals, groups or organisations who provide activities across Wales that do not fall within the remit of inspection by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and fall outside of the organisational duty to report placed on local authorities and key partners

Support for children and young people who are care experienced

Children and young people living in alternative care arrangements are among the most vulnerable in our society. Their circumstances can make them targets for sexual offenders, who often exploit the emotional needs of these children—needs such as belonging, comfort, and care. These vulnerabilities can increase the risk of sexual exploitation.

Moreover, some children enter care precisely because they have already experienced sexual harm. This prior trauma compounds their vulnerability and can have lasting effects on their wellbeing and development.

High-profile national inquiries, such as the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), have consistently highlighted the unique risks faced by care-experienced children and young people. These children are significantly more likely to experience sexual abuse than their peers who are not in care. Their experiences often include abuse, neglect, and other adverse childhood experiences, which further increase their susceptibility to harm.

In 2019, the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse published a report titled *Key Messages from Research on Looked-After Children and Child Sexual Abuse*. The report reinforced many of these concerns and emphasized the importance of tailored education:

“Sex and relationship education should be carefully delivered to looked-after children, emphasising mutuality and consent, and openly discussing grooming (including online, exploitation, and control and coercion) in relationships as well as covering gender dynamics and LGBTI issues.”

This highlights the critical need for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) to be responsive to the specific needs of care-experienced children.

In December 2024, the Children, Young People and Education Committee published *Children on the Margins*, a report focusing on children who go missing and/or are criminally exploited. It also shed light on the experiences of care-experienced young people:

“Children in care may be overrepresented in statistics about missing children. It is clear that they are disproportionately likely to go missing compared to children who are not in care. Going missing places them at risk of further harm, including exploitation and abuse. And because of the trauma that many care-experienced children have experienced, and because they may not have consistent and loving support structures around them, they are particularly vulnerable to exploitative behaviour.”

These findings align with the Centre of Expertise’s research, which underscores the ongoing risks faced by children in care.

Furthermore, care-experienced individuals who have suffered sexual abuse may face additional challenges in parenting their own children. Targeted support is essential to help them navigate these difficulties and break cycles of trauma.

It is a common but dangerous misconception that children in care are automatically safe from abuse, neglect, and harm. While many professionals and carers provide exemplary care, it is vital that all those working with care-experienced children remain vigilant. Being in care does not guarantee safety, and professionals must be alert to the signs of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Hub and Traumatic Stress Wales

Our evidence base demonstrates that the more adverse childhood experiences a child has, the more likely they are to experience sexual abuse. The ACEs hub plays an important part in raising awareness of ACEs and how to mitigate their impact.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) significantly impact mental health. They can lead to:

- Increased risk of mental health issues: ACEs are linked to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Long-term health consequences: About 1 in 3 diagnosed mental health conditions in adulthood are directly related to ACEs.
- Toxic stress: ACEs can cause toxic stress, negatively affecting brain development and mental health throughout life.
- Chronic health conditions: ACEs can also lead to chronic health issues, further complicating mental health outcomes.

The Trauma Informed Framework aims to embed a trauma informed approach across services at all levels. Though this is not specifically about responding to sexual abuse, embedding a trauma informed response across services will certainly benefit victim-survivors of child sexual abuse. Behaviours can often be expressions of distress in a child and responding in a trauma informed way promotes recovery.

Traumatic Stress Wales has a Sexual Assault Workstream in which VAWDASV, Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) and others collaborate to address sexual harm. This will be a key partner in delivery of the support elements of this strategy.

Mental Health and Vulnerable Groups

Childhood sexual abuse can have long term negative consequences for victim-survivors including a significant impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing. Attempted suicide and self-harm can be some of the ways in which the trauma and distress of the individual are exhibited. Victim-survivors sometimes require ongoing trauma informed, therapeutic support across their lifespan to recover.

The Welsh Government Mental Health Strategy 2024-2034 has recently been consulted on. Within the strategy are several vision statements that relate directly to the achievement of this strategy including:

- Vision statement 3: There is a connected system where all people will receive the appropriate level of support wherever they reach out for help
- Vision statement 4: There are seamless mental health services – person-centred, needs led and guided to the right support first time, without delay

Both relate to establishing a ‘no wrong door approach’ to mental health and wellbeing support in Wales.

Child Poverty

Our evidence base demonstrates that there are strong links between living in poverty and an increased risk of abuse, neglect and other forms of harm like criminal and sexual exploitation.

UNICEF states⁴², “One reason that poverty in childhood can have life-long impacts is because of the stress that it causes for vulnerable, developing brains and bodies”. They add that, “children also can absorb their parents’ stress: studies have shown

⁴² [How does poverty affect children differently? | UNICEF Europe and Central Asia](#)

that, as early as infancy, babies experience physiological stress in response to their mothers' own stress response”.

Living with chronic stress can increase the risks of a child having developmental delays, mental health and poorer cognitive development. Children in poverty can be at greater risk of experiencing adverse childhood experiences like interfamily violence, for example, experiences that in and of themselves increase the chance of developing depression, anxiety, or drug dependence greater. We know that the more adverse childhood experiences that children experience, the higher the risk of them being abused, neglected or harmed in some other way.

The Resolution Foundation, a living standards think tank, predicted in August 2024 that if there was no change to economic forecasts or policies from the 2024 election, an extra 1.5 million people including 400,000 children would be in relative poverty after housing costs in 2029/30, from a rate for all individuals of 22% in 2024/25 to 23% in 2029/30⁴³.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's most recent report⁴⁴ highlights the following key issues:

- Poverty in Wales is deepening
- The impact of poverty is uneven among different groups of people
- There are lasting consequences for health and education – limiting long-term prospects for Wales
- Children have consistently had the highest poverty rates, while pensioners along with working-age adults without children now have the lowest.

The Welsh Government Child Poverty Strategy 2024 seeks to ensure stronger integration across our national policies, programmes and action plans and to support collaboration at the regional and local levels. The activities being undertaken underneath this strategy will lift children and families out of poverty thereby reducing the vulnerabilities associated with poverty.

The Child Poverty Strategy for Wales represents a comprehensive approach to addressing the complex issue of child poverty. By focusing on integration, collaboration, and the well-being of families, the Welsh Government aims to create a more equitable future for all children in Wales. Continuous engagement with stakeholders and monitoring of progress will be essential to ensure the strategy's effectiveness and accountability.

⁴³ [Poverty in the UK: statistics - House of Commons Library](#)

⁴⁴ [UK Poverty 2025: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)

Youth Justice

Youth Justice is reserved to the UK Government. The Youth Justice Blueprint takes a ‘child-first, criminal-second’ approach. Preventing children from entering the criminal justice system, minimising their contact with it and maximising opportunities for diversion is essential in supporting them to lead crime free lives.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can have a significant effect on mental well-being throughout life leading to negative outcomes such as involvement in crime. Those with four or more ACEs are 15 times more likely to commit violence and 20 times more likely to be imprisoned. Policy is therefore focused on preventing and minimising the impact of ACEs, of stopping inter-generational problems and developing resilience to improve life chances.

This policy area will be particularly important in terms of the actions this strategy will take to develop a whole family approach to sibling sexual harm and a whole family, child-first approach to harmful sexual behaviour.

Community Safety

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), established by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, are made up of representatives from the police, local authorities, and the fire, health and probation services (known as responsible authorities). Half of the required partners are devolved in Wales, reflected in amendments to the Act, giving Welsh Ministers powers to set certain requirements either alone or jointly with the Secretary of State for Wales.

Police and Local Government hold joint leadership for community safety, and designated staff within local authorities have oversight administration for the CSPs.

Each responsible authority contributes their own local knowledge, professional expertise, and resources to ensure that the issues of most concern to local people are prioritised and addressed.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 enshrined the concept of statutory partnership working to reduce crime and disorder in the local community. Subsequent Home Office regulations and Acts, including the Police and Justice Act 2006, have broadened the requirements to deliver outcomes which relate to the prevention and reduction of crime and reoffending, fear of crime, anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, and harm caused by substance misuse.

The statutory responsibilities of CSPs include:

- Providing a framework for sharing information to support local problem solving Strategic assessments of need which inform the cycle of CSPs planning
- Reducing re-offending
- Commissioning domestic homicide reviews (established under s9 Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004)

Community safety and CSPs have been shaped by additional policy and legislation, including the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners within the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, who have responsibility for joining up the work of community safety and criminal justice. Notably, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which introduced Public Service Boards (PSBs), whose work provides ‘significantly overlap with the Community Safety Partnerships’ according to The Commission on Justice in Wales. PSBs undertake local well-being assessments and plans, which according to the Act, must take account of strategic assessments prepared by CSPs.

Community safety intersects with multiple policy areas and relies on effective multi-agency working at local, regional, and national levels. CSPs have oversight and responsibility for several areas under a community safety umbrella. Some support specific duties, including tackling:

- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and Disorder
- Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV)
- Terrorism and Extremism
- Substance Misuse
- Crime and Crime Prevention activity more broadly

Whereas involvement in other areas will depend on the priorities set:

- Serious Violence and Organised Crime
- Public Safety
- Modern Slavery and Exploitation of children and adults

There are other areas that interweave with the work of community safety, such as Safeguarding and Early Intervention, Youth Justice, Integrated Offender Management (IOM), and Equalities, Inclusion and Community Cohesion.

Working Together for Safer Communities: A Welsh Government review of community safety partnership working in Wales⁴⁵, published in December 2017, sets out Welsh Government’s commitment to keeping communities safe.

⁴⁵ [working-together-for-safer-communities.pdf](#)

Community Safety Partnerships are key partners in safeguarding children and young people from sexual abuse and will play a significant role in the delivery of this strategy.

4.2 Governance arrangements

Structure

Following the publication of the final strategy, a **Strategic Implementation group** will be established to oversee the implementation of the strategy, monitor and evaluate the impact the strategy is having and identify areas that require further research. The group will establish other groups as the need arises to complete discreet pieces of work.

The group will have a defined term of reference and include representation from all key stakeholders including adult victim-survivors and academics. Specialists will be co-opted as members when required.

The **Strategic Implementation** group will oversee three priority action groups and four workstream groups:

Priority action groups:

- Developing and embedding a training framework
- Developing a core data set
- Embedding a national pathway for responding to child sexual abuse

At the end of year one we will establish a monitoring and evaluation group.

Workstream groups:

- Prevention
- Protection
- Support for children and families
- Support for adult victim-survivors

There will be occasions when we will be working on actions that require input from one or more of the groups collectively and this will be achieved through task and finish groups.

The **priority action groups** will be chaired by Welsh Government.

All groups will meet quarterly to facilitate bi-annual progress reports to the Strategic Implementation group and complete task-oriented work between meetings.

Each of the groups will develop a detailed action plan derived from the priority tasks we have outlined in this strategy. The action plans will be iterative, continually reviewed, amended and added to as we move through the course of the decade to ensure that we are embedding learning promptly and using this to shape future actions.

Supported by Welsh Government and others, each of the groups will agree a set of high-level performance measures (once the scoping activity has been completed in year one by the core data set group) that will provide key information about the activities being undertaken, the outputs and the outcomes for children and families and victim-survivors.

The **Strategic Implementation group** will establish a forum for adult victim-survivors that will act as an advisory group and a children and young people's advisory group.

Establishing the delivery structure, systems and processes required to implement the strategy will be a key priority for the Safeguarding and Advocacy team in year one and year two of the strategy.

Governance and oversight

The **Strategic Implementation group** will monitor and report our progress towards the strategic objectives and overall vision to Ministers and others. Chaired by the Welsh Government, it will include senior representatives from statutory and voluntary organisations, Children's Commissioner's Office, Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW), Regional Safeguarding Boards, the National Independent Safeguarding Board, Older People's Commissioner's Office and other key partners. The group will meet quarterly.

The **Strategic Implementation group** will have oversight of the priority action and workstream groups, and this will be reported to the group bi-annually. The **Strategic Implementation group** will use the information provided in these bi-annual reports to produce an annual report on the progress made towards the strategic objectives. This report will be shared with Ministers and key partners.

We will establish an **internal policy advisory group** to include representatives from various cross-cutting policy areas. This will facilitate cross-government action that needs to be taken to achieve the vision for this strategy and provide opportunities to collaborate and share best practice. This group will meet bi-annually.

Monitoring and evaluation of specific interventions, such as awareness-raising programmes and training for professionals and volunteers, will be conducted

throughout the three-year action planning cycle and reported to the **Strategic Implementation group**.

At the conclusion of the three-year period, the **Strategic Implementation group** will develop and publish a comprehensive report detailing the progress made towards each strategic outcome, actions taken, outputs and an evaluation of the impact and outcomes for children, their families, and adult victim-survivors.

The tri-annual progress report will include a combination of narrative about the activities undertaken, quantitative data (once there is an agreed data set) and qualitative information gathered during the three-year cycle from children and their families, professionals, victim-survivors and those who have sexual thoughts about children and/or have committed sexual offences against children.

The Safeguarding and Advocacy Branch will provide secretariat support for the delivery structure. The Senior Policy Manager for Children's Safeguarding, and the Senior Policy Manager for Adult Safeguarding will be members of the **Strategic Implementation group** and contribute to priority action and workstream groups.

The Head of Safeguarding and Advocacy, Welsh Government will chair the **Strategic Implementation group** and core data set priority action group. Chairs of workstream groups will sit on the core data set group also to ensure that we develop effective measures of success for each strategic objective.

At the end of year one of the strategy a further priority action group will be established and will take responsibility for commissioning and analysing research that will inform the development of the strategy and undertake evaluation of activities and outcomes.

Appendix 2 of this document includes a diagrammatic representation of the proposed structure.

Funding the implementation of the strategy

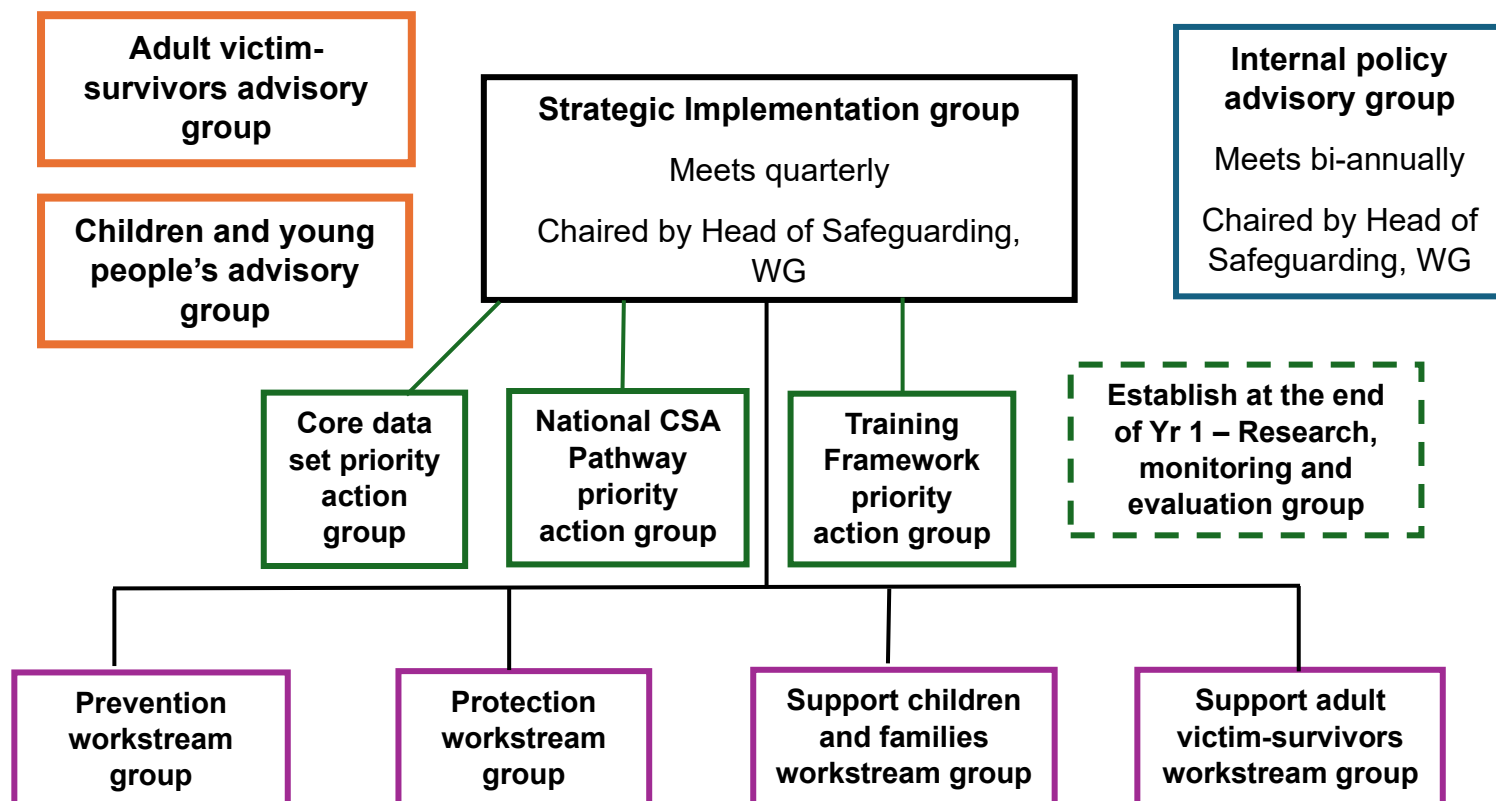
This strategy is being developed in a period of significant financial constraints and as such we have developed it with the understanding that there will need to be a way of setting priorities, ensuring best use of existing resources and clarity about what can realistically be delivered. The published strategy will include a three-year delivery plan which, over the life of the strategy, will be renewed and refreshed every three years until year nine when the strategy will be evaluated fully.

**Appendix 1: The interrelationships between this strategy and other
Government strategies, plans and workstreams**

Name of strategy/plan	Policy area	Contributes directly	Contributes indirectly	Strategic Objective
Anti Racist Wales Action Plan	Cross cutting		X	All
LGBTQ Action Plan	Cross Cutting		X	All
Disabled People's Rights Plan	Cross cutting		X	All
Gender Equality Plan	Cross cutting		X	All
Working Together for Safer Communities	Cross cutting		X	Prevention and prevention
Keeping Learners Safe	Education	X		Prevention and protection
Peer-on-peer sexual harassment action plan	Education	X		Prevention
Embedding a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing	Education		X	Prevention
Behaviour toolkit	Education		X	Prevention
Community Focussed Schools Guidance	Education		X	Prevention
Relationships and Sexuality Education Code	Education		X	Prevention
Enhancing Digital Resilience in Education: An Action Plan to protection children and young people online	Education (Hwb)	X		Prevention and protection
Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse (VAWDASV) Blueprint and Sexual Violence Workstream	VAWDASV	X		All
The Performance and Improvement Framework for Social Services (measuring activity and performance) and Children's Receiving Care and Support Census	National Office for Care and Support	X		Developing a core data set
Wales Modern Slavery Safeguarding Pathway	Modern Slavery	X		Protection
Online modern slavery training for professionals	Modern Slavery		X	Prevention and protection
Suicide and Self Harm and Mental Health strategies	Mental Health and Vulnerable Groups	X		Support (3) and (4)
NYTH/NEST	NYTH/NEST		X	Prevention

New models of care – therapeutic support for children and young people who are care experienced	NYTH/NEST		X	Support (3) and (4)
ACEs Hub Wales	ACEs Hub Wales		X	Prevention
Trauma Informed Wales Sexual Assault Workstream	Traumatic Stress Wales	X		Protection, Support (3) and (4)
Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care Quality Framework	Early Years, Childcare and Play		X	Prevention
National Minimum Standards for Childcare	Early Years, Childcare and Play		X	Prevention
Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care: Reflective Practice Toolkit	Early Years, Childcare and Play		X	Prevention
Child Poverty Strategy	Children and families		X	Prevention
Support for looked after children	Enabling People		X	Prevention, Protection and Support (3) and (4)
Community Safety	Community Safety	X		Protection

Appendix 2: The proposed delivery structure for the strategy



Priority Action Groups: These groups will be chaired by Welsh Government and meetings will take place quarterly. They will each lead on one of the identified priority actions agreed with stakeholders. Once they have fully completed the priority action they will be disbanded and may or may not be replaced with other priority action groups through iterations of the strategy. These groups will each have an action plan and measures of success.

Workstream groups: Will be chaired by a member of the Strategic Implementation group and meetings will take place quarterly. These groups will each have an action plan and measures of success.

Reporting: Both sets of groups will report progress to the Strategic Implementation group bi-annually.

Appendix 3: Questions to ask when considering sexual behaviour:

Most sexual behaviour will fall along a continuum of behaviours (see Hackett's continuum of behaviours). Determining where the behaviour falls will help us to know what constitutes a proportionate response. Additionally, the more details that we have, the greater our understanding of what may be going on for the child, and what needs and difficulties may underly the behaviour. This is a starting point only but may help us to decide what to do next.

Question to Ask	Reason
What has happened?	<p>It may seem obvious that this is the first question asked – but it isn't always the level of detail that we need. If you are told that the child has engaged in 'concerning sexual behaviour', then this is only a starting point.</p> <p>What is the child said to have done?</p>
Was it developmentally appropriate behaviour?	<p>The next thing to find out is the age of the child. - This may give us an indication immediately of whether this behaviour is age-appropriate or not. (Please see Brook Traffic Light)</p> <p>We may therefore ask if this behaviour is something that would be expected at this age or whether this indicates an older or more sophisticated sexual understanding. If the behaviour is developmentally appropriate, then what has caused the referrer to be concerned?</p> <p>NB if the child has a diagnosis that would impact on their overall presentation and understanding, it is still important to ascertain the child's chronological age.</p>
What was the context to the behaviour?	<p>Where did the incident take place?</p> <p>What time of day? What else was going on at the time?</p>

	<p>It may be relevant to know what was going on immediately – for example was it bath time, or a house party was going on – or it may be relevant to know the wider context – for example that the child has recently been excluded from school.</p> <p>Additionally, context could refer to what the child / children were doing at the time. Were they playing, fighting, sleeping, drinking alcohol? Was there an adult incident going on, such as an argument or violence?</p>
Who else was involved and how did they view the incident?	<p>Consider here the relationship of the child to the other person (siblings, other family members, peers, strangers). Consider power dynamics, such as age and size. Was the other person able to consent to the behaviour (consider their age, were they asleep, under the influence of alcohol or substances).</p> <p>Consider how the other person has perceived the behaviour – do they consider it as annoying or uncomfortable? Are they frightened, distressed or worried? Are they confused or seeking to minimise?</p> <p>This question feeds into context. Two siblings who have engaged in sexual behaviour as part of seemingly mutual play may report different feelings to a younger child or a peer who has been threatened.</p>
How did we find out about the incident?	<p>It may help us to understand a little more about the behaviour if we know how it was discovered. Did the other person involved tell someone what was happening or was this observed or found out in another way – for example</p>

	<p>by an online police investigation or by someone walking into a bedroom.</p> <p>Knowing how a behaviour was discovered can help us to learn something about the child's understanding. Whether a child attempted to secure secrecy or not may help us to gauge whether a child had any understanding that what they were doing wasn't ok.</p> <p>Also, if a behaviour was discovered by chance, for example between siblings, then it may be necessary to consider that the behaviour may have taken place on more than one occasion. This would then feed into a safety plan, and ongoing supervision arrangements.</p>
Was this an isolated incident?	<p>If a behaviour is a one-off incident of inappropriate or problematic sexual behaviour, then it may elicit a different response to a behaviour that is part of ongoing inappropriate or problematic sexual behaviours. It may be suggestive of a different set of needs and difficulties for the child.</p> <p>The answer to this question may help us to understand whether there are patterns emerging of sexual behaviours, whether there is an escalation of sexual behaviours, or whether the current responses to the previous sexual behaviours have not been appropriate.</p>
Were there any other factors involved (aggression/violence, adult involvement, filming of the incident)	<p>Further to our understanding of context, is getting an understanding of whether there were other factors involved that may help us to consider the severity of the behaviour further. This may help us</p>

	<p>to know whether we need to take further safeguarding action.</p> <p>As well as thinking about the harm that the child may have engaged in, these factors may be indicators that the child needs safeguarding themselves, and additional services may be needed to safeguard the child who has been harmed.</p> <p>If additional factors, that increase our concern for those involved, are identified, then it would be necessary to hold a strategy discussion.</p>
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