

WELSH GOVERNMENT INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Title of proposal:	2026-2036 Strategy and first three year delivery plan for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse in Wales
Official(s) completing the Integrated Impact Assessment (name(s) and name of team):	Zarah Newman, Safeguarding Advisor and Policy Manager, Safeguarding and Advocacy, National Office for Care and Support
Department:	Social Services and Integration Directorate
Head of Division/SRO (name):	Taryn Stephens, Deputy Chief Social Care Officer
Cabinet Secretary/Minister responsible:	Dawn Bowden, Minister for Children and Social Care
Start Date:	22.10.25

2026 – 2036 STRATEGY FOR PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

SECTION 1. WHAT ACTION IS THE WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSIDERING AND WHY?

Child sexual abuse

Welsh Government is publishing a ten-year strategy for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse in Wales alongside a three-year delivery plan. Between 2019 and 2022 the Welsh Government had in place a National Action Plan for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse. Whilst this achieved a significant amount of progress, particularly in terms of resources for children, parents/carers and professionals, feedback from stakeholders indicated a longer-term vision was required that tackled some of the pervasive cultural issues e.g. attitudes towards victims, that could not be achieved within three years and additionally, they wanted support for adult victim-survivors included.

Long term

The strategy covers a period of ten years and will have three-year delivery plans that sit beneath it to drive the work forward. The delivery plan includes a longer-term vision and short-term (three years) actions to achieve positive change.

The aim is to prevent sexual abuse from taking place, mitigate its effects if it has taken place, assist children, siblings, parents/caregivers and other family members and adult victim-survivors to recover and to work with those who have sexual thoughts/have offended sexually against children to prevent future harm.

Prevention

The strategy has four strategic objectives: Prevention is one of the four objectives and focuses on educating and raising the awareness of children, their parents/caregivers and professionals who support them of what child sexual abuse is, the forms it can take, how to prevent/identify/respond and report concerns. Early identification and prevention is also promoted throughout the strategy under the three other strategic objectives: Protecting and responding effectively to children when there are concerns about child sexual abuse; Supporting children and families to recover; and Supporting adult victim-survivors to recover.

Integration

We have mapped the intersections across agencies, partnerships and within Welsh Government across policy areas. The strategy requires multi-agency, cross Government, cross sector input and includes all those who have a role to play in supporting children and

young people to be safe from sexual abuse and supporting adult victim-survivors. The strategy has been cross referenced to other Welsh Government strategies, policies and programmes. We will be establishing a delivery structure that promotes collaboration and partnership in delivering on the strategic vision.

Collaboration

Additional to the relevant partnerships, agencies and policy areas that will be engaged, there will be a Children and Young People’s Advisory Group and an Adult Victim-survivors Advisory Group established to ensure that lived experience sits at the centre of the strategy.

Involvement

We considered how we would involve children in developing the strategy due to the highly sensitive nature of the topic and potential negative impact on children participating. We commissioned a rapid review of international research from the last five years seeking to identify the voices of children already available to us. This review also made recommendations about how we continue to engage with children and young people on this topic.

Adult victim-survivors participated in engagement sessions and contributed to the formal public consultation.

Impact

Doing nothing is not an option for us. Child Sexual Abuse can have a severe impact on children and adults’ physical, emotional and mental health. It can impact on their health, social care, education, employment and life chances.

We have amassed a significant body of evidence that includes the impact this can have on individuals and families and the costs to them and to society.

Costs and savings

The Strategy has been developed in a period of financial constraint 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 being clear about what can realistically be delivered. This does not mean we will not be ambitious, but we need to consider this when planning during the lifetime of the strategy.

The strategy, when published, will be accompanied by a delivery plan, setting out shorter-term actions over the next three years. Delivery plans will be renewed and refreshed throughout the lifetime of the strategy.

It is estimated that Child Sexual Abuse costs the public purse a billion pounds in economic terms annually across agencies such as health, social care, education, courts and police. Taking collective action, early identification and intervention, preventing child sexual abuse or mitigating its impact, removing duplication from systems and offering the right support at the right time to people affected could financially benefit public services in the long term though not realise any savings in the short term.

Mechanism

The original National Plan was published under the duties for local authorities and key partners and Regional Safeguarding Boards in the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 and subsequent regulations. This strategy will be published under the same, though this also complements duties for local authorities and key partners under Section 28 of the Children Act 2004.

SECTION 8. CONCLUSION

8.1 How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

Adult victim-survivors have co-produced the strategy and helped to shape the actions in the delivery plan. This has been achieved through a series of five workshops held at the end of 2023 and beginning of 2024 and via the public consultation on the draft strategy undertaken between July and October 2025. Outside of the consultation process we have been working with victim-survivor groups to inform the strategy, but also to begin planning for the establishment of an adult victim-survivor advisory group.

We thoroughly considered how the voices of children and young people could be captured in the strategy and delivery plan without risking re-traumatisation. A Rapid Review was commissioned of the last five years of international research that included talking and listening to children and in which they had expressed views on how to prevent child sexual abuse, the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding response to child sexual abuse and the support they had been offered/received.

The author was asked to capture any good practice identified by children and young people and conversely to capture any messages from them about how this can be improved. These key messages are contained within the strategy document and reflected in the delivery plan for 2026-2029.

Additionally, responses from children and young people were received via some organisational responses to the consultation. These echoed the findings of the rapid review and have been incorporated in the same way.

Professionals working with child sexual abuse have been consulted as part of the five workshops we ran, the public consultation undertaken and engagement with third sector providers of child sexual abuse services, policy leads in related policy areas in Welsh Government and engagement with a range of other groups of professionals.

8.2 What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

This strategy represents a transformational shift in how Wales prevents, identifies, responds to, and supports recovery from child sexual abuse. By embedding a whole-system approach grounded in children's rights, trauma-informed practice, and multi-agency collaboration, the strategy will deliver wide-reaching benefits for children, parents and caregivers, siblings, and adult victim-survivors.

Impact on Children

For children, the positive impacts are both immediate and long-term. The strategy strengthens Wales's commitment to ensuring that every child is protected from harm and that responses are timely, compassionate, and effective. Through improved public awareness and preventative measures, children will benefit from safer environments in

their homes, schools, childcare settings, community spaces, and online. Increased understanding among the public and professionals lowers the threshold for recognising early indicators of risk, meaning concerns are more likely to be identified before harm occurs.

Frontline professionals across education, health, policing, and social care will be better equipped to act decisively through enhanced training and the adoption of national pathways that support consistent, child-centred responses. This reduces regional variation and ensures that children receive the same level of protection and support regardless of where they live in Wales. Children will also experience more coordinated support due to clearer information-sharing arrangements and improved access to specialist expertise. This means fewer delays, fewer repeated assessments, and a smoother, more coherent journey through the safeguarding system.

The long-term benefit is the promotion of resilience and recovery. By embedding trauma-informed practice across all services, children will be supported in ways that validate their experiences, minimise re-traumatisation, and empower them to regain a sense of safety, trust, and control. The strategy's commitment to mapping support services and strengthening commissioning arrangements ensures that children affected by sexual abuse will have access to appropriate therapeutic, emotional, and practical support both immediately and throughout their recovery.

Impact on Parents and Caregivers

Non-abusing parents and caregivers play a crucial role in a child's recovery, yet they often face emotional, practical, and relational challenges when navigating the aftermath of abuse. The strategy's focus on developing a better understanding of their experiences and needs will ensure that support services are more responsive and tailored. This includes recognising the emotional toll on parents and caregivers, who may experience guilt, shock, or distress, and ensuring they are supported in ways that strengthen their ability to care for their child effectively.

Clearer pathways, improved communication between agencies, and better signposting will help parents feel informed and able to engage confidently with the safeguarding process. When parents understand what to expect and feel supported by professionals, they are better positioned to advocate for their child and contribute meaningfully to decision-making. The move towards more sustainable commissioning also creates more consistent support options for caregivers, reducing the stress that can come from navigating fragmented or inconsistent services.

Over time, this will help families rebuild trust and confidence, strengthen relationships, and create an environment that supports the child's healing and resilience.

Impact on Siblings

Siblings often experience secondary trauma, confusion, or anxiety when a brother or sister has been sexually abused, yet their needs can be overlooked. By explicitly recognising siblings within its scope, the strategy ensures a more holistic response that considers the broader family system. Siblings will benefit from improved access to information, emotional support, and therapeutic interventions where required.

As multi-agency pathways become more embedded, professionals will be better equipped to consider how the safeguarding process affects all children within a household. This helps reduce further harm, ensures siblings' voices are heard, and provides reassurance and stability at a time when family dynamics may be significantly disrupted. Supporting siblings also strengthens the overall protective capacity of the family, contributing to safer, healthier environments for all children involved.

Impact on Adult Victim-Survivors

For adult victim-survivors, the strategy represents a clear recognition of their right to lifelong support and recovery. Many adult survivors have long navigated complex emotional and psychological impacts without adequate access to specialised services. By mapping current provision and developing sustainable commissioning for adult support services, the strategy ensures more consistent, accessible, and trauma-informed care.

Improved public understanding and professional competency will help reduce stigma, empowering survivors to seek help without fear of judgement. Strengthening trauma-informed practice across agencies means that adult survivors will encounter services that understand the long-term impacts of child sexual abuse, respect their experiences, and support them at their own pace.

Furthermore, integrating the voices and experiences of survivors in shaping services will ensure that support is meaningful, effective, and aligned with real needs. In the long term, the strategy's whole-system approach will contribute to breaking cycles of harm, supporting survivors to rebuild their lives, strengthen relationships, and experience improved wellbeing.

8.3 In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

- **maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,**
- **avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?**

The strategy has significant potential to contribute to all **seven wellbeing goals** outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which include: a prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal Wales, cohesive communities, vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales.

By strengthening early intervention, prevention, trauma-informed support, and multi-agency collaboration, the strategy directly supports long-term improvements to the safety, wellbeing, and life chances of children, families, and adult victim-survivors. To maximise these contributions, the strategy aligns with the Act's **five ways of working**—long-term thinking, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement—in every stage of design, delivery and evaluation. Applying these principles ensures the strategy not only addresses immediate safeguarding concerns but also tackles the wider social and economic inequalities that underpin vulnerability to abuse.

To maximise positive impacts, the Strategy will strengthen alignment with wider wellbeing objectives by ensuring that all public bodies integrate child sexual abuse prevention and trauma-informed recovery into their plans.

The strategy contributes to:

- **A healthier Wales** through improved mental and emotional wellbeing support;
- **A more equal Wales** by reducing disparities in access to services and ensuring equity of access, experiences and outcomes for all Welsh people;
- **A Wales of cohesive communities** through strengthened public awareness and safe community environments; and
- **A prosperous Wales** by supporting children's ability to learn, thrive and reach their potential free from the long-term impacts of abuse.
- Embedding the Welsh language and culturally sensitive practice will also strengthen contributions to **vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language**.
- commitment to safeguarding as a human rights issue reinforces Wales's ambitions as **a globally responsible nation**.

Where adverse impacts may arise—such as increased pressure on specialist services, inconsistency in local capacity, or the risk of re-traumatisation through repeated assessments— Welsh Government could mitigate these through strategic investment, workforce development and system redesign across the next decade.

Strengthening commissioning frameworks and quality-assurance processes will help prevent variability in service availability. Welsh Government already provides guidance to reduce duplication across agencies, improve information-sharing systems, and ensure trauma-informed approaches are consistently applied to avoid causing further harm.

Meaningful involvement of children, families and adult victim-survivor networks in shaping implementation will help identify unintended consequences early and maintain alignment with the **involvement** and **collaboration** duties under the Act. Annual and triannual summaries of progress will include feedback is incorporated into new iterations of the Delivery Plan.

A whole-system data approach, supported by a core data set, will allow Welsh Government, Regional Safeguarding Boards and other public bodies to monitor progress,

anticipate risks, and adapt the strategy over time in line with the Act's **long-term** and **preventative** ways of working. In doing so, the strategy will not only mitigate potential harms but also maximise its contribution to a safer, fairer and more resilient Wales for current and future generations.

8.4 How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

Evaluation will take place throughout the lifetime of the strategy. A delivery structure will be established that includes:

- Strategic Implementation and Oversight Board
- A workstream group for each strategic objective
- A Monitoring and Evaluation group
- A children and young people's advisory group
- An adult victim-survivors advisory group

Each group will provide biannual highlight reports to the Board detailing progress made and any challenges. These reports will be used to create an annual summary of progress that will be presented to Ministers and published on the website. Every third year we will complete a review of the strategy and delivery plan. This will enable us to provide an overview of progress made, any challenges, any changes that need to be made to the strategy and/or amendments/changes for the next three-year Delivery Plan. It is at this point that we will review the IIA to ensure that any changes being made are assessed and amend the IIA as required.

SECTION 9. DECLARATION

Declaration

I am satisfied that the impact of the proposed action has been adequately assessed and recorded.

Name of Senior Responsible Officer / Deputy Director: Taryn Stephens

Department: National Office for Care and Support

Date: