**Children, Families and Education Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Agenda Item No. 9**

**4th November 2025**

**Child Sexual Abuse**

**Ward(s): All**

**Portfolios: Councillor M. Statham – Children, Families & Lifelong Learning**

## 1. Aim

1.1 This report aims to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of how children and young people at risk of, or affected by, Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) are identified, supported, and safeguarded within Walsall. It sets out the current local practice, response, and support arrangements, and places these within the wider national and regional context.

1.2 The report highlights the steps taken by Walsall Safeguarding Partnership's dedicated CSA subgroup in the preceding 12-month period which brings together Police, Probation, Health, and Children's Services to drive forward strategic intentions and practice improvements. The CSA sub-group is Co-Chaired by Director of Children's Services, Walsall Council, Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children, Black Country ICB and Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children, Black Country ICB.

## 2. Recommendations

1. Scrutiny and Overview Committee to have oversight of the refreshed Child Sexual Abuse strategy.

2. Scrutiny and Overview Committee to note that Joint Targeted Area Inspections of the response to Interfamilial Child Sexual Abuse are currently underway, and to identify areas of practice that could benefit from further assurance work or development (December 2025)

3. To note the on-going work and progress that the Child Sexual Abuse subgroup has made to date.

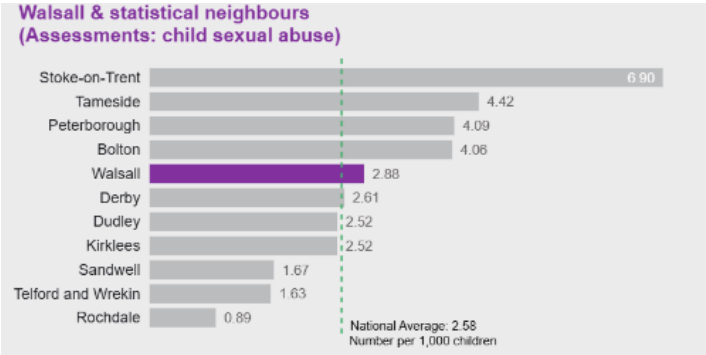
## 3. Report detail – know

### 3.1 Context – Data

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is one of the most hidden forms of abuse. Every year, far more children are sexually abused than agencies identify, with an estimated 1 in 20 children in the UK experiencing CSA. In 2023/2024 alone, an estimated 500,000 children were

sexually abused in England and Wales, according to the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse who have developed a data insights hub utilising data from local authorities and police forces nationally.

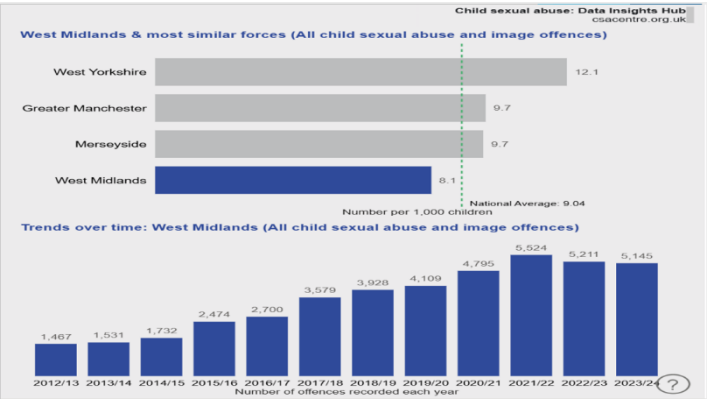

Data from the centre of expertise on child abuse reports data from 2023/24. During this reporting period the national average in terms of assessment undertaken due to concerns regarding sexual abuse was 2.58 children per 1,000. Within the same reporting period data from Walsall was above the national average, reported at 2.88 children per 1,000.




Within Walsall between 1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025 3371 referrals were received to MASH of which **312** were in relation to sexual abuse, which is representative of **9.25%** of total referrals. Of the 312 referrals **32%** were received from the police, the largest referring agency.

| Locality | No. Referrals |
|---|---|
| Central and South | 70 |
| East | 47 |
| North | 92 |
| West | 84 |
| (blank) | 19 |
| Grand Total | 312 |

This graph shows that the national average for all child sexual abuse and image offences reported to Police in 2023/2024 was 9.04. West Midlands Police was below the national average at 8.1. By contrast neighbouring forces, Staffordshire was 8.6 and West Mercia 10.4.



In the first half of this financial year, 1st April 2025 - 30th September there have been **173** referrals in relation to sexual abuse. This represents **9.3%** referrals received to MASH during this reporting period. If data represented in first half of the year repeats itself, we would expect to see a slight increase on the previous year, in relation to referrals received with regard sexual abuse.

Decisions with regard MASH should be made within 24 hours of the receipt of referrals. Data highlights that where sexual abuse is cited as the referral reason, 50.3% (157) decisions were made within 24 hours.

38 out of 312 children referred have had repeat referrals within the last 12 months, of which 2 children had had two previous referrals within this period.

| | **MASH RAG** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Source of referral** | **a) Red** | **b) Amber** | **c) Green** | **(blank)** | **Grand Total** |
| Anonymous | 1 | 2 | | | 3 |
| Health services - A&E (accident and emergency department) | 3 | | | | 3 |
| Health services - GP | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Health services - Other eg. hospice | | 5 | | | 5 |
| Health services - Other primary health services | 3 | 7 | 1 | | 11 |
| Individual - Acquaintance eg. neighbours / child minders | | 3 | | | 3 |
| Individual - Family member / relative / carer | 6 | 6 | | | 12 |
| LA Services - Early Help | 16 | 4 | | | 20 |
| LA Services - external, from another local authority's services, for example social care or early help | 13 | 9 | | | 22 |
| LA Services - other internal services, not including social care or early help | 10 | 3 | | | 13 |
| LA Services - Social care eg. adults social care | 11 | 14 | | | 25 |
| Other - eg. childrens centres / independent agency providers / voluntary organisations | 3 | 6 | | | 9 |
| Other legal agency - e.g. courts / probation / immigration / CAFCASS / prison. | 4 | 21 | | | 25 |
| Police | 35 | 66 | | | 101 |
| Schools | 36 | 23 | | | 59 |
| (blank) | | | | | |
| **Grand Total** | **142** | **169** | **1** | | **312** |

The table above highlights data regarding the referrals in relation to child sexual abuse over the course of 2024-2025 reporting year with the Rag rated outcomes associated to the referral. Just over 50% of referrals received from education with regard sexual abuse have been red rag rated.

Within the reporting year of all 3371 referrals received 18.8% are Red RAG rated and 70.2% RAG rated amber. By contrast, when comparing this to referrals received in relation to CSA 45% referrals are RED RAG rated and 54% Amber, indicating that concerns are taken seriously at the outset.

During the reporting period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025 **160** strategy discussions have been convened at point of referral to children social care due to concerns related to child sexual abuse.

| Locality | Count of C/YP Name |
|---|---|
| **Central and South** | **32** |
| **East** | **28** |
| **North** | **40** |
| **West** | **44** |
| **(blank)** | **16** |
| **Grand Total** | **160** |

| Locality | Count of C/YP Name |
|---|---|
| **Central and South** | **2** |
| **East** | **1** |
| **North** | **1** |
| **(blank)** | **4** |
| **Grand Total** | **8** |

For 8 children referred within this period no further action was taken by statutory children services. Data highlights that for 3 of these children they were referred from another local authority or early help. With respectively one child referred from police, education, health, VCS or adult social care accounting for the other 5 children. No children within this cohort had had a previous referral within the last 12 months

As of the 17th October 2025 we currently have 6 children and young people subject to child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse. Of these, two were White British and four were from other groups. Research states that whilst the likelihood of experiencing child sexual abuse does not vary significantly between ethnic groups, some minority ethnic groups do experience barriers to reporting sexual abuse. There are a greater proportion of children who are subject to child protection plans where child sexual abuse is a potential concern however the primary record of abuse maybe neglect or emotional. Quality assurance activity is planned to review children subject to assessments and strategy discussions where child sexual abuse is a feature to cross reference the outcomes in respect of further planning.

| Age | Gender | Ethnicity |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | Female | White British |
| 11 months | Male | White British |
| 11 | Male | Pakistani |
| 15 | Male | Any Other White Background |
| 9 | Female | Any Other White Background |
| Unborn | | Any Other White Background |

### 3.2 Context - National Key Findings and Recommendations

**Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAIs):** In February 2020, the first round of JTAIs on Interfamilial Sexual Abuse were conducted. Inspections across six local authority areas highlighted the need for both national and local long-term strategies to better understand

and reduce CSA. They found that professionals often rely too much on children verbally disclosing abuse, sometimes overlook that children displaying harmful sexual behaviour may themselves be victims, and that support for children and families is often insufficient. The quality of criminal investigations into CSA was also found to be inconsistent. A task and finish group has been stood up that includes representation from the multi agency child protection team, this is to ensure that any learning locally is applied to our multi agency child protection team development.

**Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA): Subsequently, the IICSA's 'Truth Project'** gathered accounts from over 6,000 victims and survivors, nearly half of whom experienced abuse within the family. Key suggestions for change included raising awareness, improving prevention strategies, and providing more training for professionals. The IICSA also identified barriers to support for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who are three times more likely to experience sexual abuse, and highlighted additional challenges faced by children from Black and other minoritised communities due to cultural stereotypes and racism.

**Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel – "I Wanted Them All to Notice" (2024):** The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published a report in November 2024, analysing rapid reviews and serious case reviews. The findings echoed previous JTAI conclusions and recommended that strategic partners develop local action plans in response. The review also called for a further Joint Targeted Area Inspection to revisit the multi-agency response to CSA. Given these developments the inspectorates (Ofsted, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation) have agreed that a second round of JTAI's will commence this autumn.

**National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (June 2025, Baroness Casey):** This national audit finds that group-based child sexual exploitation (CSE) by so-called "grooming gangs" is a rare but extremely serious crime, involving multiple perpetrators who coerce, manipulate, and abuse vulnerable children—predominantly girls aged 10–15, often in care or with additional vulnerabilities. Despite decades of reviews and public concern, the audit highlights persistent failures: there is no reliable national data on the true scale or nature of group-based CSE, with inconsistent definitions and poor recording, especially regarding the ethnicity of perpetrators. While most victims are girls and most perpetrators are men, local data in some areas shows a disproportionate number of suspects from Asian backgrounds, but national data is too incomplete for firm conclusions. The audit criticises repeated large scale events, inquiry, and recommendations without sustained improvement, and calls for urgent action: tightening laws so adults who have sex with children under 16 are charged with rape, improving data collection (especially on ethnicity), enforcing better information sharing between agencies, and treating CSE investigations with the seriousness of organised crime.

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership have received and analysed all of the above reports and recommendations have been considered by the Child Sexual Abuse Group to inform local action planning. In addition, the findings have been discussed at a regional level to ensure where there is opportunity to progress relevant actions across the seven authority areas to strengthen the response to CSA these are acted on, e.g. development of the Regional CSA Pathway. Furthermore the initial report findings are being considered as part of Walsall's child sexual exploitation response.

### 3.3 Regional CSA Pathway

The CSA Centre and the West Midlands Regional Safeguarding Partnership have partnered initially for one year to enhance the knowledge, skills, and confidence of the multi-agency workforce on child sexual abuse through the implementation of the Response Pathway. This system-wide approach supports individual practice by providing evidence-based resources, guidance, and tools. To support development of the pathway, each area was required to complete local quality assurance activity to identify the areas of practice that could best be supported. There is no 'one size fits all' - the Response Pathway is designed to be flexible so that practitioners can draw on different parts as they require. The aim of the pathway is to help people identify child sexual abuse and make child-focused decisions. Walsall participated in bi-monthly regional meetings to support the development of the pathway which will be launched this Autumn. A series of free webinars and multi-agency training sessions to support the rollout and dissemination of related practice resources has also been delivered. The CSA Centre has recognised the advanced position of Walsall in the development of the pathway.

### 3.4 What Practitioners Told Us

In April 2025, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership commissioned piece of work with Dr Helen Lowey to explore the emotional, psychological, and professional challenges faced by practitioners when responding to child sexual abuse (CSA). Its work highlights the complexity of CSA, including intrafamilial and extrafamilial abuse, and its intersection with other adversities such as neglect, disability, and socio-economic disadvantage. The review captured the voice of practitioner by undertaking focus groups across health, education, social care, and police sectors, highlighting the emotional toll felt by practitioners and fear of misjudgement among professionals. The review also helpfully drew on literature reviews. Barriers to disclosure, especially for non-verbal and pre-verbal children, were highlighted as concerns to the practitioners alongside issues such as requiring more specialist training in areas like assessing those who posed a risk to children where there is no conviction, the need for more coordinated and thoughtful data capture, clinical support pathways and public health campaigns to support community understanding of child sexual abuse. The report made six key recommendations, including developing the training offer to better capture the gaps identified by practitioners, improved supervision, multi-agency collaboration, and strategies to better support professionals and empower children to disclose abuse safely and confidently. WSP have responded to all recommendations. We have focused on ensuring that good quality supervision is in place for all staff and this will be further enhanced by the role of the Lead Child Protection Practitioners in FFCP who will lead group supervisions. A training programme is in place and further enhancements are being developed. All actions form part of the CSA sub-group workplan.

### 3.5 Training & Resources

Child Sexual Abuse is a complex area. Professionals need comprehensive training to recognise the signs of abuse and handle disclosures with sensitivity and confidence. They also need clear, accessible reporting procedures that protect both the child and the professional. Building a supportive environment where discussions about abuse are encouraged rather than avoided is essential. By addressing these challenges, we can

empower professionals to act decisively when a child's safety is at risk, helping to create safer spaces for children to grow and thrive.

Over the course of the last 12 months significant training has been offered both via the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership, it's local partners and national experts with sessions targeted towards practitioners' specific needs.

Training delivered:

- Weddle training -assessing the non abusing parent.
- Working together to meet the needs of children and young people who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Responding to harmful sexual behaviour in education settings
- Spotting the signs and indicators of Child Sexual abuse
- Putting the child sexual abuse pathway into practice
- Speaking to children about sexual abuse
- Responding effectively to sibling sexual behaviour
- Supporting parents/carers when their child may have been sexual abused
- Online sexual offending: supporting families following arrest of a parent
- Lucy Faithful- working with perpetrators.

The ICB held a Multiagency Lunch and Learn webinar to launch a number of CSA resources and professional guidance, in December 2024. The resources were created in partnership by South London CSA Support Services and NHS England. The resources consisted of guidance for children, families and professionals to help develop a shared understanding of what might happen after a child has been sexually abused. The resources have been shared electronically and printed versions sent out across health and charitable organisations to assist professionals with supporting children and families with CSA.

### 3.6 NSPCC Snapshot

The Walsall CSA Snapshot Report, facilitated by the NSPCC, was led by members of the CSA sub-group and Leadership Group in July and also captured feedback from the frontline. The review recognises the significant progress made since 'Operation Satchel' led to the WSP identifying CSA as a partnership priority in 2023 – achievements include improvements in strategic collaboration, training, and safeguarding pathways. The report also identifies areas for development in practitioner confidence, public awareness, data integration, and trauma-informed recovery services. There were some inconsistencies noted in recognising non-disclosure abuse, fragmented offender management, and the need to enhance support for children with SEND and those displaying harmful sexual behaviour. To note Walsall has an offer for children who display sexually harmful behaviour, the service has been expanded in recognition of the importance of supporting children who exhibited these behaviours. The report concludes with detailed recommendations to strengthen CSA strategy, improve training and data sharing, enhance public engagement, and ensure accessible, coordinated support for children, families, and adult survivors. The WSP Children's Leadership Group (CLG) held its annual development day on 20th October and received this report from the NSPCC. The

CLG accepted the recommendations in full and agreed that these would form the basis of the CSA refreshed strategy and associated action plan.

### 3.7 Conference

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership hosted a CSA conference on 31st March 2025 at Bescot Stadium. The event was attended by 140 multi-agency professionals, and the focus was 'Supporting Professionals who work to Protect Children from Sexual Abuse'. The event was led by key speaker Dr Zoe Loderick who is an experienced sexualised


trauma therapist.

The aims of the event included:

- Protecting staff from vicarious trauma and burnout.
- Enhance confidence in working with child sexual abuse.
- Supporting professionals working with parents with learning difficulties.
- Supporting professionals to work with sexual investigations effectively.
- Developing understanding of the sex offenders.

The conference received excellent evaluations. Participants reported increased confidence in applying their learning and a strong intention to embed this into practice. Most rated the quality of the event as *excellent* and confirmed the learning objectives were fully met. Feedback praised the engaging presentations, the focus on real-life disclosures, and the practical strategies offered to support both staff and children.

Some examples of the feedback include:

- "This is the first year I have really experienced disclosure of a sexual nature and remember not being able to switch off for weeks afterwards. Now I will know how to deal with future disclosures and will remember everything Zoe recommended. Thank You for organising and providing this help it was much needed."
- "This was one of the most engaging conferences I have attended".

### 3.8 Learning from Practice & Listening to the voice of those with lived experience

The Safeguarding Adult Board published SAR 9 this year, a review which shares learning in relation to the sexual abuse of a young adult (who we refer to as 'Jessica'). The WSP have been privileged to work with Jessica as she was keen to tell her story in a way that she and others with a learning difficulty could understand. Jessica's chose to create an animation with the partnership, and she wanted to ensure that those working with children also heard her messages. We launched 'Jessica's Story' at our CSA conference in March

2025. Since then, we have also delivered two bite-sized briefings to continue to share the learning, and the information has been shared in our ‘spotlight’ newsletter. It will also be delivered again during Adult Safeguarding Week in November 2025. Recently Jessica attended the CSA sub-group to talk to strategic leadership about her experiences of working with the partnership. She told us,

“It’s been amazing because it’s helped me to help others. I wanted to do this for my baby. It has given me loads of confidence. I wouldn’t have liked it if the report was finished and I’d never got to hear what happened next and what difference it is making. I think everyone should be asked do they want to work with the partnership, and they should be allowed to choose.

I was proud of myself going to the conference, there was so many people there. I felt I could work with ‘X’ and the team because I have learned to trust her. They have done things slowly for me and explained everything really good and I know I can say no if I want to. Relationships are so important I know who I can trust because they take time with me. It’s important that other services know this too. This year I have finished college and done volunteering work. I couldn’t have done any of that without the help of my supported living service and some people aren’t as lucky as me”

## 4. Financial information

There are no financial considerations outlined with this report.

## 5. Reducing Inequalities

There are, no direct considerations with regard reducing inequalities with this report. However, the CSA response pathway and training need to ensure that we are robust in our response to all children and young people within the borough.

Consideration needs to be given regarding proportionately of children and young people with disability and additional needs and the additional training and support that is required to the professional network to ensure we are recognising, responding and meeting the individual needs of all children at risk of child sexual abuse.

## 7. Respond

This report has indicated the work that is currently being undertaken in relation to recognising, responding and investigating CSA, to ensure learning from the national and local reviews are connected into our partnership responses.

Recommendations received following the presentation of this report will be explored with the CSA sub-group.

## 8. Review

This paper has outlined the work that is currently taking place within the Safeguarding Partnership to ensure robust responses to CSA. It is essential that the partnership continues to review the effectiveness of current identification, support, and safeguarding arrangements for children and young people at risk of or affected by child sexual abuse. Particular attention should be given to the consistency and timeliness of multi-agency

responses, the quality and accessibility of practitioner training, and the integration of learning from national and local reviews into everyday practice. Ongoing scrutiny should also focus on improving data collection and sharing, addressing gaps in support for children with additional needs or from minoritised communities, and ensuring that the voices of children, families, and practitioners are central to service development. By regularly evaluating these areas, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee can support the partnership by providing an additional level of scrutiny and critical analysis to ensure that its strategy remains robust, evidence-informed, and responsive to emerging challenges.

Walsall has significantly developed its strategic response to child sexual abuse and there is an ambitious plan in place to ensure that any identified areas of development are addressed. It is essential that we continue on this journey in order to keep vulnerable children safe from harm and support those in the community to be alert to the signs of child sexual abuse with clarity around where to seek support. We will continue to work as a partnership to develop pathways of support to ensure that survivors of child sexual abuse receive the much needed support needed.

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