

10th March 2025

Child Sexual Abuse

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Childrens Social care

1. Aim

This report provides an overview of the current landscape of practice, response and support for children and young people who have been identified to be at risk of or experienced Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) within the borough.

The report details the national and regional picture with regarding recognising, responding and supporting these children, young people and families. In June 2023, CSA became a priority within Walsall Safeguarding Partnership following the conclusion of 'Operation Satchel' which culminated in the convictions of 21 adults on CSA charges, from several families. In September 2023 the Partnership formed a multi-agency sub-group, consisting of representatives from Police, Probation, Health and Local Authority Children's Services. This Safeguarding Partnership sub-group is currently progressing the 6 recommendations that have been drawn from the national review published in November 2024. The report outlines in detail the work currently being undertaken alongside the next steps to ensure a robust partnership response to safeguarding children and young people.

2. Recommendations

- Scrutiny and Overview Committee to have oversight of the refreshed CSA strategy which will be informed by the findings from focus groups and the CSA conference and implementation of the regional pathway and finding from the current research underway (Summer 2025)
- Scrutiny and Overview Committee to request an update with regard strategic and practice responses, to seek assurance that children who present a risk of sexual harm are identified and safeguarded from harm in a timely way (Summer 2025)
- To note the on-going work and progress that the CSA subgroup has made to date.

3. Report detail – know

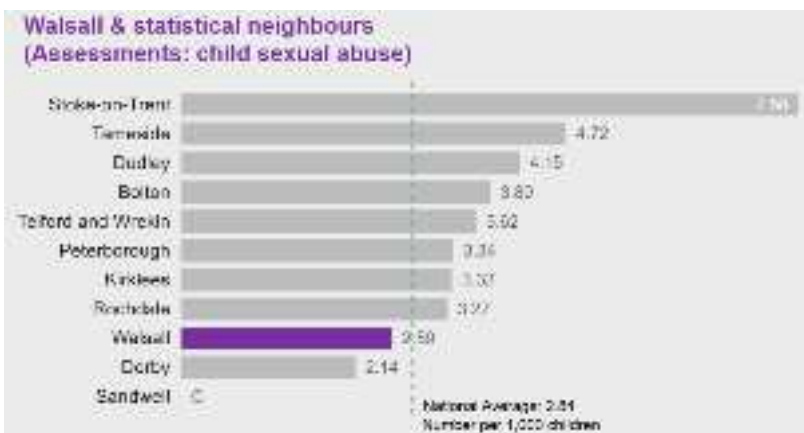
3.1 Context

Child Sexual abuse (CSA) remains a serious issue, affecting thousands of children each year, with an estimated 1 in 20 children in the UK experiencing CSA. CSA can take many forms, including physical contact, exploitation, grooming, and online abuse. CSA has long-lasting emotional and psychological harm. Despite increased awareness and efforts to protect children, many abuse remains undetected or unreported.

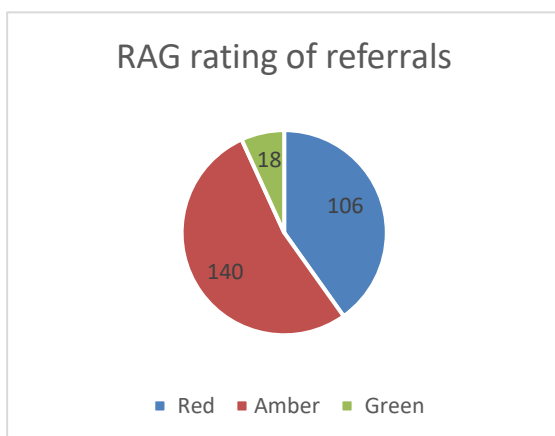


The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published “I wanted them all to notice” Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment in November 2024. The findings of this national review highlight a systemic failure across all services to recognise and respond when children are at risk of, or are already, being sexually abused by someone in their family environment.

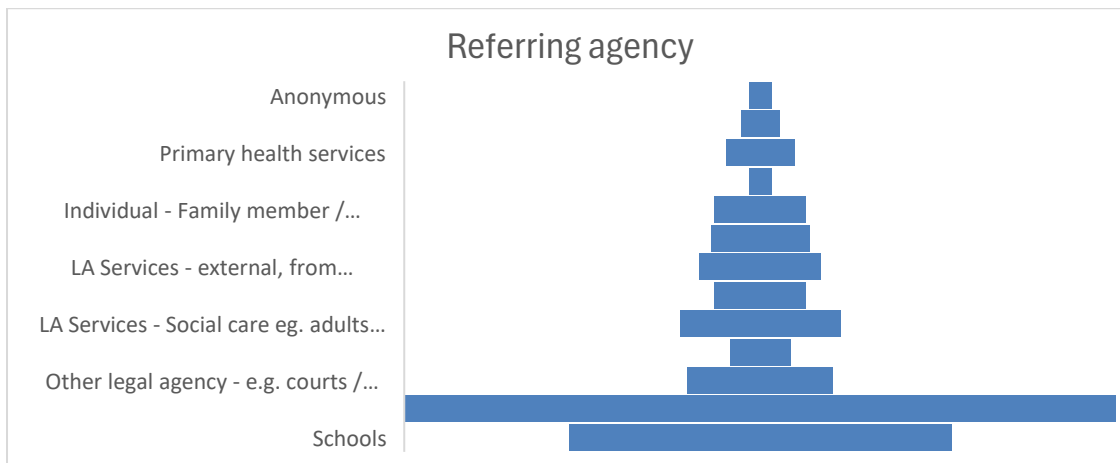
The centre of expertise on child abuse have developed a data insights hub utilising data from local authorities and police nationally.



Data from the centre of expertise on child abuse reports data from 2022/23. During this reporting period 2,300 children were supported via child protection plans nationally under the category of sexual abuse, with the national average being identified as 2.84 children per 1,000. Within the same reporting period data from Walsall was reported at 2.59 children per 1,000.



Within Walsall from the 1st April 2024 until the 18th February 2025, **264** referrals were received to the front door due to concerns relating to CSA. Of the **264** referrals received, 35% of these were received from the police with **106** of these referrals being RAG rated red following initial screening.



	Strategy discussion		Total
	Yes	No	
Central and South	32	34	66
East	26	19	45
North	29	43	72
West	39	28	67
(blank)	13	1	14
Grand Total	139	125	264

During the reporting period 1st April 2024 to 18th February 2025 **139** strategy discussions have been convened at point of referral to children social care due to concerns related to child sexual abuse.

Within Walsall as of the 19th February 2025 we have 10 children subject to child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse. Of these 10 children 2 are female, aged under the age of two years-old, with the remaining 8 children, males aged between 0-12 years-old, further demographics of these children are noted in the table. These 10 children represent 3.5% of children and young people subject to child protection plans, with the most predominant category of harm being emotional abuse.

8 of these children have been subject to child protection plans for between 3-6 months, with one child support by a child protection plan for less than three months, the final child aged 5 months has been supported by a child protection plan for over 6 months following a pre-birth assessment being undertaken.

For both children aged under the age of one year, pre birth assessments have been undertaken with, support established via a multi-agency child protection plan prior to their birth. It is key to identify that it is evident that professionals are ensuring information is shared by partner agencies with children's social care to ensure effective and timely pre-birth assessment are undertaken when adults within their immediate family have been deemed as posing a risk.

Of note none of these 10 children have previously been subject to child protection plans prior to this current period of support, which indicates that risk factors aligning with CSA are promptly assessed and responded to.

Age	Gender	Ethnicity
12	Male	White British
10	Male	Pakistani
12	Male	Pakistani
8	Male	White British
6	Male	White British
1	Female	White British
1	Female	Pakistani
0	Male	White British
0	Male	
1	Male	White British

3.2 CSA subgroup

In June 2023, CSA became a priority within Walsall Safeguarding Partnership following the conclusion of 'Operation Satchel' which culminated in the convictions of 21 adults on CSA charges, from several families. In September 2023 the Partnership formed a multi-agency sub-group, consisting of representatives from Police, Probation, Health and Local Authority Children's Services. The group are responsible for driving forward a number of actions on behalf of the Partnership including:

- Developing a multi-agency dataset that can support the partnership to assess scale of CSA in Walsall and the impact of multi-agency response
- Developing a multi-agency practice pathway to support best practice
- Conducting quality assurance activity (audits) to seek assurance that multi-agency practice is keeping children safe
- Developing awareness of CSA through campaigns, conferences, resource development, website information
- Ensuring professionals have access to good quality training

The CSA strategy will be further informed by work being undertaken in Walsall by Dr Helen Lowey. At this time there are three active workstreams, with the final stream being informed by the literature review and focus group findings

A. To understand the evidence base in relation to professionals responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment

Literature Review: Undertake a literature review that seeks to explore the beliefs, attitudes and understanding of CSA amongst professionals and to determine what prevents them from, or enables them to, explore CSA when engaging with children.

B. To explore professional's emotive responses to child sexual abuse and the impact this has on responding.

Focus Groups: Undertake focus groups with professionals to explore their emotional responses towards CSA, and whether or not this, impacts on their identification and response.

C. To consider learning from the Quality Assurance Process

To review the learning from the Quality Assurance Process, and its activity locally, and to conduct additional activity, where identified, in respect of Walsall's response to CSA with a specific focus on outcomes for Children, Parents, learning and best practice.

D. Theory of Change, Logic Model and Evaluation Framework

Develop a Theory of Change, with clear outcomes, that takes a Logic Model Approach to understanding professional's beliefs and attitudes towards CSA that enables an Evaluation Framework to be considered.

The focus will be towards professional beliefs and attitudes in relation to raising CSA with children, families, other professionals, drawing on the findings from the literature review and, the focus groups.

3.3 Training

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 18 months a variety of training has been offered both via the Walsall safeguarding partnership and within individual agencies depending on the needs of specific practitioners.

Training delivered:

- Weddle training
- Child Sexual Abuse Workshop: Hearing and Responding to allegations/disclosures and the role of the professional network
- Working together to meet the needs of children and young people who have displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviour
- Speaking to children about sexual abuse
- Spotting the signs and indicators of child sexual abuse
- Putting the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway into Practice
- Supporting parents/carers when their child may have been sexually abused
- Responding to Harmful Sexual behaviour in education settings
- Lucy Faithful Foundation Training

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.

Within the partnership significant attention has been paid to developing effective training for practitioners in relation CSA; however, we have been acutely aware that further understanding needs to be gained with regard the emotional and psychological impact for practitioners to ensure training provided is effectively translated into day-to-day practice with children young people and their families. Therefore, as part of the work being undertaken by the Walsall safeguarding partnership, we are running single agency focus groups to gain a better understanding of: **What enables professionals to consider child sexual abuse and what are the barriers?**

The aim was to have between 3-8 people per focus group and the following professionals were invited:

- 4 focus groups for Children's Social Care
- 4 focus groups for NHS / Health professionals
- 3 focus groups for Police
- 3 focus groups for Education professionals

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership are to host a CSA conference on 31st March 2025 at Bescot Stadium. The event is open to 200 multi-agency professionals and the focus will on 'Supporting Professionals who work to Protect Children from Sexual Abuse'. The event is being led by key speaker Dr Zoe Loderick who is an experienced sexualised trauma therapist. Feedback from the above

workshops will inform the event and Dr Loderick’s input will enable professionals in Walsall to respond in line with national best practice.

3.4 Audits

Three specific audits have been undertaken within children’s social care and the Walsall safeguarding partnership in relation to CSA:

- *Dip sample children subject to CP plans Sexual abuse February 2025*
- *SARC audit August 2024*
- *Walsall Safeguarding Partnership multi agency audit Q1 2023-2024*

Learning reflected through multi-agency audits will be overseen by Safeguarding Partnership.

Good practice	Areas of practice development
<p>Positive relationship-based engagement with families resulting in effective interventions with children and their parents.</p> <p>Evidence of good joined up working particularly between Schools and Children’s Social Care.</p> <p>Strategy Meetings are held as appropriate – legal threshold of significant harm had been met and in accordance with WTSC</p> <p>Strategy discussion involve all partner agencies to ensure clarity and understanding of lived experience and support safety planning for children and young people</p> <p>CSC are clear in relation to their thresholds regarding risk if police decision is no further action.</p> <p>Section 47 enquires are undertaken by the multi-agency partners this provides a clear holistic picture of risk and understanding of the child’s lived experiences</p>	<p>Improved multi-agency plans and planning required where there are ongoing police investigations</p> <p>Missed opportunities across partnership to identify potential early signs of CSA</p> <p>SARC/CYPSAS Representatives to contribute to decision making and this to be reflected in meeting minutes</p> <p>Delay in accessing specialist support for children and young people regarding sexually harmful behaviours</p> <p>Plans need to be specific about identified risk</p> <p>Ensure practitioners are confident in talking to children and young people about their disclosures of CSA</p> <p>Police need to ensure they are sharing detailed information within strategy discussion regarding “no further action” being taken within investigations.</p> <p>Although safety plans are in place for all children and young people it would be beneficial to ensure these are developed in collaboration with family members</p>

3.5 Regional response pathway

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership have been working with the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, drawing on their national best practice resources to develop local pathways. More recently, the other 6 West Midlands Police area Safeguarding Partnerships have expressed an interest in developing their pathways in line with the Centre of Expertise and as a result Walsall have joined a regional task group to bring the work together across the West Midlands area. This will mean that there is one consistent set of practice guidance for all professionals working within the West Midlands, which is particularly beneficial for those working across borders. The launch of the CSA pathway is anticipated in March 2025.

3.6 “I wanted them all to notice”

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published “I wanted them all to notice” Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment in November 2024. The findings of this national review highlight a systemic failure across all services nationally to recognise and respond when children are at risk of, or are already, being sexually abused by someone in their family environment.

The report makes 6 recommendations. These are:

- 1) Safeguarding partners should consider the findings of this national review and develop a local action plan to respond to its recommendations as it affects local multi-agency practice.
- 2) Safeguarding partners should undertake a multi-agency training needs assessment, to ensure that their practitioners are able to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in this area. This should include the achieving best evidence joint training.
- 3) Safeguarding partners should audit the quality of local multi-agency decision making when responding to concerns about child sexual abuse. This may include adoption of a pathway approach, use of guidance about signs and indicators of sexual abuse and reviewing threshold documents about assessment of need and risk
- 4) Safeguarding partners should, with all relevant agencies such as the Probation Service, review how people who present a risk of sexual harm and who have contact with children are assessed and managed, with information about risk shared across agencies in a timely way. Partners should consider the use of civil orders and other measures to effectively manage the risk from the person of concern
- 5) Safeguarding partners should take necessary steps to ensure that all practitioners in their area (including foster carers) understand and are confident in talking directly to children, and families, about concerns of sexual abuse, taking due account of ethnicity, language and disability
- 6) Safeguarding partners should ensure that there are local pathways for referring children for appropriate forensic medical and other health assessments, for both recent and non-recent sexual abuse, and that safeguarding practitioners understand them.

Locally, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership have considered the findings from the report and drawn the recommendations into the CSA sub-group action plan. A few of the recommendations were already being progressed in Walsall, as has been outlined in this report. The learning from the National Review will also be shared at the CSA conference and will inform the refresh of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership CSA Strategy which the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership plans to review following the conference on 31st March 2025. Walsall Safeguarding Partnership have also arranged to work with the NSPCC to undertake a strategic ‘snapshot’ of the local response to CSA in Walsall. A session with strategic leaders and the NSPCC is scheduled to take place in May 2025 from which the refreshed strategy will then be developed.

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 needs 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 review is interweaved 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. “I wanted them to listen” was published in November 2024 by the Child Safeguarding and Review Panel outlining 6 key recommendations which are currently being progressed in Walsall, as has been outlined in this report. The learning from the National Review will also be shared at the CSA conference and will inform the refresh of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership CSA Strategy which the Partnership plans to review following the conference on 31st March 2025. Walsall Safeguarding Partnership have also arranged to work with the NSPCC to undertake a strategic ‘snapshot’ of the local response to CSA in Walsall. This will ensure that local practice is informed by local, national and best practice and developed in conjunction with front line staff.

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