

**Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
16<sup>th</sup> April 2024**

**Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment.**

**Cllr Stacie Elson - Children's Portfolio Holder**

**Executive Summary**

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership recognises that Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is prevalent in the UK and that for many victims, the impact of this abuse can be devastating and endure into adulthood. In June 2023 CSA became the fourth strategic priority in Walsall following a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy Review, Scope and Proposal being presented at Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Executive Group in April 2023. A CSA subgroup was formed in September 2023 with the specific aim of ensuring that there is a shared understanding of the impact of CSA and how, as a partnership, we work with children, young people and families at the earliest opportunity to prevent long lasting impact.

There are nearly 13 million children in England and Wales, each of whom needs and deserves to be protected from harm. Babies, toddlers and children are potentially at risk, with current estimates indicating that 1 in 6 girls and 1 in 20 boys experience child sexual abuse before the age of 16. In March 2020, the Office for National Statistics estimated that 3.1 million adults in England and Wales had experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16. Both nationally and locally there is concern around the number of safeguarding cases featuring child sexual abuse within the family environment. The role of the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup is to address the challenges in identification, assessment and response to child sexual abuse within the family environment. A strategic needs assessment focussed on child sexual abuse will be completed by Summer 2024 supporting a revised Child Sexual Abuse Strategy.

**2. Reason for Scrutiny**

This is the first annual report outlining previous and current partnership activity relating to tackling Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment in Walsall. The report serves to update the committee of the work undertaken to date of the CSA Subgroup and the recently formed CSA delivery group. This report aims to provide assurances and updates into the partnership response to Child Sexual abuse.

**3. Recommendations**

To note and endorse the current plans over seen by the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup and child sexual abuse delivery group.

**Resource and legal considerations**

Responding to children at risk of significant harm is a statutory duty placed on Local Authority Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, Strategic Partnership Chairs and senior managers within organisations who commission and provide services for children and families. The resources required to respond to this statutory requirement

come from within the existing resources across the partnership of organisations working in Walsall to protect vulnerable children and those at risk of harm.

### **Council Corporate Plan Priorities**

One of our corporate priorities is that children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well. We also aim to provide people to have increased independence, improved health, and can positively contribute to their communities. In Walsall, we strive to ensure that communities are prospering and resilient and that our children are living in safe and healthy places that build a strong sense of belonging and cohesion.

### **Citizen impact**

The effective delivery of high quality services to protect children and young people from significant harm, including the risk of child sexual abuse which has a direct impact on the welfare and well-being of children and young people in Walsall. It directly links to the corporate priority to Improve Health and Wellbeing and the Children's Services objective that all children in Walsall, whatever their needs, are safe and supported.

### **Environmental impact**

Not applicable for this report

### **Performance management**

Protection from abuse is a fundamental right for all children. Our vision continues to ensure that children, young people and their families whose lives are affected by child sexual abuse will receive a high level of support, protection, and that offenders are held accountable for their actions, and brought to justice.

There are both quantitative and qualitative measures being considered to ensure that there is both assurance and insight into the current work being underway and to inform continued service development. The Child Sexual Abuse Delivery Group, which reports into the Subgroup and takes forward the partnership work plan has begun to map data and performance information. This work will inform the proposed Child Sexual Abuse Strategic Needs Assessment, which will offer a comprehensive analysis of the strengths and areas for development in the Walsall Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

### **Reducing inequalities**

The Equality Act 2010 puts a responsibility on public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. This applies to the process of identification of need and risk faced by the individual child and the process of assessment. No child or group of children must be treated any less favourably than others in being able to access effective services which meet their particular needs. To comply with the Equality Act 2010, safeguarding partners must assess and where appropriate put in place measures ahead of time to support all children and families to access services, overcoming any barriers they may face due to a particular protected characteristic (WT-23).

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership developed a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy (2020-2023) This sets out the vision that Walsall Council has to ensure the co-ordinated provision of services designed to address the protection of children at risk of sexual harm. Dr Helen Lowey will be completing a revised Strategic Needs that will inform an updated strategy

in light of Walsall Safeguarding Partnership determining that child sexual abuse is to be seen as a strategic priority. Dr Helen Lowey has already completed strategic needs analysis in other related areas such as sexual exploitation and domestic abuse. The revised strategy will outline specific support for those children and young people who are at risk of significant harm, including those with protected characteristics of gender, disability, race and religion.

In line with our corporate priorities, Walsall sets out the response to secure improvements in the equality of services in order to have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children and young people. Local Authorities, Police and Health Services as key local partners must provide a robust safeguarding approach to ensure they have arrangements in place to provide adequate protection for children at risk of child sexual abuse. This work will be overseen and scrutinised by the key functions of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership business unit.

## Introduction

Sexual abuse is defined in Working Together 2023 as:

***Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts, such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing, and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children.***

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where 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 (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or 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.

Both forms of abuse are strategic priorities in Walsall, the decision to have two distinct strategies one for CSA and one for child exploitation is in recognition that whilst both are forms of sexual abuse, they each require focussed attention in order to be able to provide an effective partnership response given the intra and extra familial distinctions. The work of the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup is focussed on child sexual abuse within the family environment. Abuse may involve relatives, or others who feel like family from the child's point of view. The family environment is a common context in which child sexual abuse occurs accounting for almost half of all child sexual abuse offences reported to the police in England and Wales. Most people who sexual abuse children in a family context are male, although abuse by females does occur. There has been debate within the Child Sexual Abuse Subgroup and Delivery Group that seeks to widen the scope of the existing strategy to widen the scope of activity and understanding of child sexual abuse in considering online abuse.



# Difficulty in identification of child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse often takes place alongside other forms of physical, emotional abuse or neglect. Both nationally, regionally and locally the rates of children subject to child protection plans are low though with refreshed attention and focus there has been some increases. Where sexual abuse occurs, it is not commonly witnessed by an independent third party. Victims of sexual abuse are often vulnerable children, allegations of sexual abuse often emerge a considerable time after the sexual abuse has taken place and may emerge in a piecemeal fashion. Data analysed by the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse outlines how far more children are sexually abused than services identify:

Far more children are sexually abused than services identify

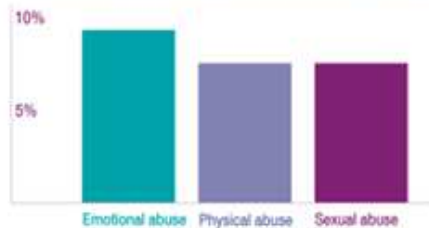
Child sexual abuse in 2021/22: Trends in official data  
csacentre.org.uk



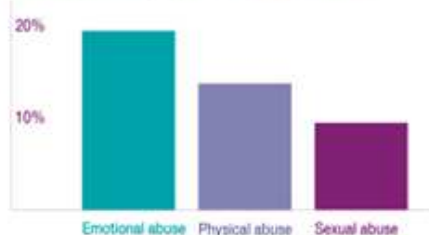
# Sexual abuse is just as common as other forms of childhood abuse

But concerns of sexual abuse are far less likely to be identified and named

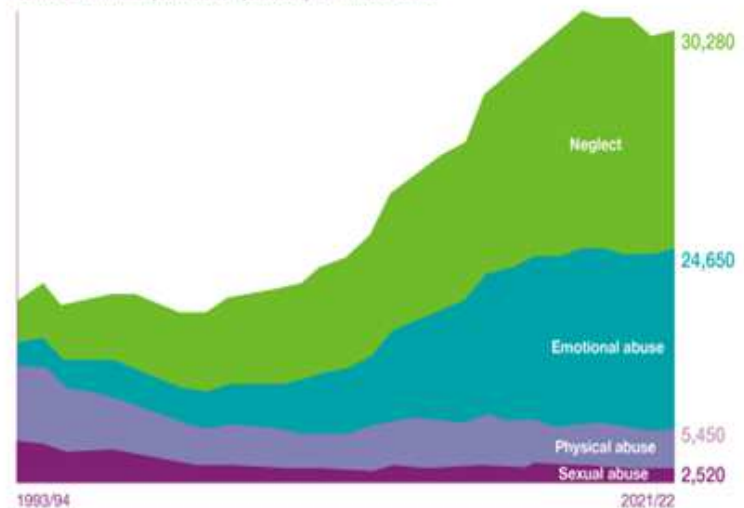
Similar levels of child abuse are identified in surveys



...but lower levels of child sexual abuse are identified in child protection assessments



Number of child protection plans by form of abuse



Sources: Office for National Statistics, Child abuse in England and Wales, 2020; Department for Education, Characteristics of Children in need, 2021/22

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

## The National Context

Nationally, reports have identified the need for organisations to adopt a strategic approach that prioritises the identification and response to child sexual abuse particularly that occurring in and around the family environment. Recognising evidence relating to historic difficulties, the government has identified the importance of equipping professional working directly with children with the understanding and skills they need to identify child sexual abuse. With the voices and experience of victims and survivors at the centre so that they are safeguarded and supported, improving the understanding of the scale and nature of sexual abuse has been identified. In addition, ensuring more effective disruption and prevention by better understanding the abusive behaviour/perpetration.

## Local Context

In 2020, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership multi-agency partners commenced work on the Walsall Safeguarding Children Partnership Strategy Multi-Agency Response to Child Sexual Abuse 2020-2023. The Strategy was signed off in July 2021 at the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Subgroup (As it was in 2020, the equivalent of the Senior Leadership Group-SLG, as it is now). It was acknowledged that all Walsall Safeguarding Partnership members must take a leadership approach in bringing the strategy and resulting implementation to their agency. The effectiveness of each agency's approach to CSA would be monitored through Section 11 audits, multi-agency file audits and the performance and quality assurance subgroup activity. There was an ask that all Partnership members must commit to ensuring their staff access appropriate training and take responsibility for raising awareness amongst themselves and with their service users. This work was to provide the foundation for CSA becoming a fourth partnership priority, once sufficient traction had been gained. Work relating to child sexual abuse in

Walsall required greater prominence, momentum with strengthened governance and the necessary resources to drive the agenda forward.

In May 2023, the conviction of twenty-one people for serious sexual offending against children in Walsall was one of the biggest investigations in the West Midlands. The children from one of these families was part of the W6 Safeguarding Child Review (SCR) 2018 which was part of the larger Operational Satchel investigation. Recommendations from the W6 SCR report informed the development of an action plan. Amongst these was the need for WSP to develop a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy. This was completed in 2020 and is published on the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership web site.

In June 2023 CSA became the fourth strategic priority in Walsall following a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy Review, Scope and Proposal being presented at Walsall Safeguarding Partnership Executive Group in April 2023. The focus of this priority is CSA in the family environment. Operation Satchel identified the prevalence of sexual abuse over many years within several families. Given the scale and profile of the abuse, Walsall Safeguarding Partnership need to be able to continue to evidence that any subsequent learning that has emerged has been used to inform work in this area. It was recognised that the CSA Strategy needed to be updated along with devising a clear assessment, and plan.

Due to Operation Satchel, findings from other learning reviews and the increased awareness surrounding sexual abuse, in Walsall close monitoring of increased need and demand for services will be required. The borough is also likely to be a place of interest and learning locally, regionally, and nationally. Recognising the complexities and challenges, the government has identified child sexual abuse as a priority and is making significant investment in this area.

Collectively these reports demonstrate a shift towards adopting a whole system/public health type focus which recognises the impact of sexual abuse primarily for victims and survivors and communities (Centre of Expertise (2019) and Tackling Child Sexual Abuse (2021) The Report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (ICSA 2022). Both the importance of a national framework with the flexibility for local leaders to respond to local issues is identified. Finally, the importance of intelligence led and data informed approaches including research about victims, survivors, locations, and perpetrators (see data section). Crucially, the current development to the WSP Performance and Quality Assurance Framework also reflects this approach.

The child safeguarding practice panel conducted a national review into child sexual abuse within the family home and are due to report findings in Summer 2024. The sub group are alive to these developments as the same key lines of enquiry that led to the national review resonate in the key challenges locally. The two strands of the enquiry involve:

- safeguarding partners and multi-agency bodies working together to identify offenders in or entering a child's family home with an express aim of better improving multi agency collaboration.
- Robust responses to allegations or suspicions of child sexual abuse within the family environment to protect children from ongoing or recurrent harm.

Walsall Safeguarding Partnership have identified the need to review work in this area and the need to work in collaboration with organisations such as the Centre of Expertise in Sexual Abuse to adopt a systemic approach. Building upon the strengths identified as



part of the ILAC and JTAI inspections this will strengthen the response. Ensuring that the voice and experience of our 4<sup>th</sup> partners is heard and that practitioners are supported with clear outcome measures that measure impact is critical. Collectively, this will enable creative, innovative and evidence informed ways of tackling sexual abuse to support identification, response, support, and prevention.

### **Progress of CSA Subgroup**

The CSA subgroup was formed in recognition of child sexual abuse as a strategic priority, the first subgroup met in September 23 and meeting bi-monthly from this point. There is partnership commitment reflected by the commitment of time and expertise to the subgroup with senior leaders of all key statutory and voluntary organisations forming the membership of the subgroup. To deal with a problem as pervasive and destructive as child sexual abuse, everyone must work together. Expertise lies in many different places: in lived experiences, practice knowledge and academic research. The CSA subgroup is making an active effort to draw on both partnership expertise alongside the expertise of other organisations in order to support the ambitious delivery plan. There is a need to improve our understanding of the incidence and prevalence of CSA; to support greater professional confidence; to build a greater capacity for prevention and response; and to better support children and their families.

In addition, the CSA Delivery Group has also been established, and first met in December 23. The Delivery group meets on a monthly basis to progress the Delivery Plan, taking on board the complexities of CSA and the need to adopt a phased approach.

### **The four P approach**

As with All Age Exploitation, the 4 P approach (Plan, Prepare, Prevent and prosecute) is being used alongside the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership PQA Framework to underpin this work. There has been an evidenced partnership approach to the work of this group, the plan that has been developed and the pace that it is being progressed. The phased plan includes two strands: a short-term plan which the Delivery Group is currently working on and a further long-term plan will be reviewed from April 24 whilst the Strategic Needs Assessment (SNA) is being undertaken. The CSA subgroup has used the findings from the Proposal Report and MAA Children's Audit to inform the interim plan. Commencement of the SNA is due to commence in Spring 24 and Professor Helen Lowry has been commissioned to undertake this work. Due to the ongoing work around CSA and Exploitation it has been agreed at the Executive Group that that the Conference initially planned for March 24 will be delayed until September 24 to allow for the SNA to be completed and work to then commence on updating the Strategy.

A risk register is being formulated in congruence with Walsall Safeguarding Partnership subgroup expectations. This will enable close scrutiny on timeliness of the delivery of the SNA, strategy and delivery plan.

Working Together 2023 sets out partnership arrangements and responsibilities. The ambitions of the CSA subgroup have been devised to be congruent with the guidance and practice standards defined within this key document:

- an unrelenting focus on protection and the best outcomes for children.
- creating learning cultures in which practitioners stay up to date as new evidence of best practice emerges.

- creating an environment in which it is safe to challenge, including assumptions that relate to ethnicity, sex, disability, and sexuality.
- supporting practitioners with effective supervision as determined by their regulatory body in which they can critically reflect on their findings and strengthen their analysis.
- helping practitioners to understand the impact of their decisions on the child and family.

## **Health**

The Designated Nurses across the system take responsibility for a portfolio of work which is overseen by the ICB Safeguarding Steering Group. These portfolios include cross cutting safeguarding issues where standardisation of approach and monitoring is desirable and necessary and so that duplication of effort can be avoided. As part of this, Child Sexual Abuse is a key workstream across the Black Country (B/C) footprint. Both the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children in Walsall and the Designated Dr for Safeguarding (Walsall) are active members of this group. In addition, they are both co-chairs of the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership CSA Subgroup. The Partnership CSA Strategic Subgroup and also the Delivery Group both include health professionals from SARC for both Children and Adults, Walsall Health Care Trust and Black Country Healthcare Foundation Trust.

A systemwide anogenital symptoms management pathway has been developed by the Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children. It is a pathway for the management of children who present with anogenital symptoms with no disclosure of sexual assault/abuse and how this should be managed by health professionals to try and allay the anxiety around anogenital examination.

There was a well attended lunch where there was a focus on practical advice for practitioners to increase confidence and effectiveness in supporting children and families. The Designated Doctor for Safeguarding Children provided a session explaining and demystifying the medical examination in suspected child sexual abuse to allow professionals to better support children and families. Evaluations were positive, a formal evaluation has been requested from the Centre of Expertise.

The Black Country Child Sexual Abuse Conference for Health Professionals was held on the 14th November 23 in conjunction with the Centre for Expertise in CSA. The agenda covered the scale and nature of CSA, the barriers to identification and the impact of CSA. There was a focus on practical advice for practitioners to increase confidence and effectiveness in supporting children and families. Evaluations were positive, a formal evaluation have also been requested from the Centre of Expertise.

## **Training and Development**

A suite of training has been developed within the partnership focussed on both the wider partnerships identification and response to child sexual abuse, alongside more specialist training for practitioners who will investigate and undertake safeguarding actions in response to allegations or suspicions of child sexual abuse within the family environment. The aim has been to offer a broad preventative training offer to improve professional confidence and understanding around child sexual abuse for all professionals across the partnership, and then to provide more in depth and focused training for social workers and other professional leads. In addition to this, an in depth 'practice leads' offer has also been developed so that safeguarding leads, social workers and managers could under a

year long programme of development work. This would then be applied by those practitioners in their work with children and families, and they will also act as skilled and knowledgeable peers who can provide consultation, guidance and direct support for their colleagues when working with children and families where child sexual abuse is of concern.

Feedback from these sessions was positive and the skill and experience brought by the Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse was recognised as highly beneficial. Feedback has been though that there remains a need for further development in using specific tools and methods when assessing needs, vulnerabilities, and risks around child sexual abuse. This will inform a second wave of training, which is being prepared so all practitioners can have training in child sexual abuse suitable to their needs. This specific piece of work has involved utilising the expertise of partners such as the police and probation as well as reaching out to the Lucy Faithfull Foundation who are experts within the field in order to elicit expertise and develop training and tools designed to support practitioners' confidence within these areas. A literature review is also underway led by our Principal Social Worker to ensure there is alignment of proposed training and tools that compliment our existing offer.

### **Progress of the Delivery Group**

The Delivery Group has met three times since it was formed in December 2023, and will be meeting monthly going forwards. The initial focus of the group has been to review and develop the CSA Work Plan, to identify and address actions which can be undertaken immediately to gain traction and get some key areas of the work plan done, and to establish a methodology and approach to continuing practice improvement.

The Work Plan has been updated, and The Delivery Group has set out a methodology based on understanding what data and performance information is available, exploring what this may tell us, and aligning this with planned quality assurance work. This combination of quantitative data analysis and qualitative audits and practice evaluations will be used to continuously understand practice across the partnership and identify areas for practice learning that will then be added to the Work Plan. The Delivery Group has reviewed data collation across the partnership that support understanding of child sexual abuse within the borough. Both Children's Social Care and the Police have provided overview data that can form the baseline of enquiry, and other partners have also contributed their data. This data is in the process of being cross referenced to give an initial partnership data set.

Alongside this, previous audits have identified key strands of work. The Delivery Group and Task and Finish Groups has and will be picking up these key areas as follows:

1. A group has been established and reviewed resources and information available on the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership for all professionals.
2. The group has collated an updated list of all services and key contacts for all professionals.
3. Good practice learning is being collated into a staff briefing.
4. The group will review practice learning for disabled children and children with learning needs.
5. An updated Child Sexual Abuse multi-agency pathway is being developed to provide guidance for all professionals.

6. Updated needs and risk assessment tools and resources are being developed. The first stage is to evaluate the literature on best practice and to explore existing tools.
7. A simple signs and indicators – ‘Things to Look Out For’ for all professionals and that can be adapted for families will be developed.
8. Review the current training programme, take up across the partnership, and its effectiveness, and develop future iterations of CSA training offer.
9. Link with partnership work on inter-agency communication systems.

These key areas will be delivered in 2024 to continue with gaining traction on the progress of the Work Plan, whilst also getting systems in place for continued learning and improvement as above.

## **Decide**

Whilst the CSA subgroup is in its infancy the impetus for change and commitment of the partnership is demonstrating strengths in wanting to make the changes needed in order to safeguard our children from harm. Significant activity has been undertaken in order that we deliver strategic partnership priorities of:

1. Ensuring that there is strategic commitment across all agencies to understand, prevent and reduce the impact of CSA.
2. Improve the capability of the multi-agency workforce to recognise and act on the signs of CSA.
3. Improve the effectiveness of assessment, planning and interventions to reduce CSA and respond in a consistent and timely way.
4. Evaluate our practice and systems through the use of our quality assurance mechanisms.

The committee is invited to determine whether the work completed to date will deliver the desired outcomes and to note the direction of travel.

## **Background papers**

None

## **Authors**

Rita Homer

Director of Children’s Social Work

☎ 655547 ✉ [Rita.homer@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Rita.homer@walsall.gov.uk)

Sophie Read-Willetts

Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children -Walsall

✉ [Sophie.read-willetts@nhs.net](mailto:Sophie.read-willetts@nhs.net)

Dr Catherine Williams

Speciality Doctor Community Paediatrics, Royal Wolverhampton Hospital NHS Trust

✉ [Catherine.williams15@nhs.net](mailto:Catherine.williams15@nhs.net)

Antony Schaffarczyk

Head of Locality Family Safeguarding

☎ 655547 ✉ [Antony.shaffarczyk@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:Antony.shaffarczyk@walsall.gov.uk)