

# ssia

Social Services Improvement Agency  
Asiantaeth Gwella'r Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

## Child Sexual Exploitation – It Can and Does Happen Here

### A Resource Pack for Councillors in Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## Introduction

The Welsh Local Government Association has worked with the Social Services Improvement Agency to produce three workbooks for Councillors. This one is about Child Sexual Exploitation and the others are on Corporate Parenting and Safeguarding Adults. These three topics emerged as those on which Councillors would find briefings most helpful.

This workbook does not aim to be a textbook on the law and practice concerning Child Sexual Exploitation, Looked After Children and Young People. It simply provides useful pointers as to how Councillors themselves can fulfil their duties to children and young people.

In particular, we suggest lines of enquiry which will throw helpful light on how well your Council is doing by these children and young people, and steps you can take to make a difference. As such it is designed to be brief and to-the-point. There will often not be clear definitive answers to the questions we suggest. Rather, these enquiries will prompt reflection, increase understanding, and point to issues to pursue. You and your officers will need to prioritise and programme your approach on the basis of the best available intelligence as you will not have the capacity to pursue all possible lines of enquiry.

Every Councillor has responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and young people. Alongside the NHS and the Police, councils have a key responsibility to lead in preventing the abuse and neglect of children with care and support needs and in ensuring that there is a good response when concerns are raised. The responses to the prevention of abuse and neglect will vary depending on circumstances. In some cases it may be appropriate and necessary to take the child into care and this is where specific corporate parenting responsibilities come into play. In others, the safeguarding response will be to work with that child or young person and their family and identify what support is needed to ensure that they are safe and their well-being is promoted. This is often done without the need to adopt formal care proceedings.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of Child Sexual Abuse. It can be both premeditated and planned, as well as opportunistic and carried out with complete lack of respect or empathy for victims.

Key messages from recent CSE inquiries have provided a wake-up call for Councillors and every professional working in the field of child protection along with those responsible for scrutinising safeguarding arrangements. These messages must be translated into positive action so we can tackle CSE more effectively.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge the good work being done in Wales to address the issue, we also need to ask what more can be done to safeguard children in our local area. This is a particular challenge in the context of rising demands on Councils and our partners for children's social care services and within the context of significantly reduced budgets. Members need to have a good understanding of CSE and the range and level of local practice in order to be in a position to provide a proper degree of scrutiny of CSE arrangements and ensure that appropriate and robust responses to the issues are in place. This is not just important for Lead Members on scrutiny panels but for all councillors when discharging their corporate parenting responsibilities.

Protecting children from CSE is not just the job of local councils. It requires effective inter-agency working to develop and implement co-ordinated activity, using local evidence and information, appropriately shared.

This resource pack is aimed at Elected Members at all levels and has been written to assist Members to understand better the complexity of CSE so that they can provide appropriate and informed challenge. You will also find on reading this document, that we have cross referenced it with our resource on Corporate Parenting as the two issues are inextricably linked.

The pack provides insight into some of the CSE key themes and issues and draws on some of the messages from recent reviews and inquiries. *It also provides Members with real case studies and good practice initiatives that are to be found in Wales.*

**Councillor Huw David**

WLGA Spokesperson

Children and Young People

## The Council's Care for Children

It is part of a council's duty to safeguard and promote a child's well-being (as set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014), but what does the term 'welfare' mean in its encompassing of the Act's universal well-being outcomes? The following help us understand these key aspects:

- Physical and mental health and emotional well-being
- Social and behavioural development
- Protection from abuse and neglect
- Education, training and recreation
- Family and personal relationships
- Involvement in the local community
- Securing rights and entitlements
- Social and economic well-being, including not living in poverty
- Living in suitable accommodation

Councils play a crucial, statutory role in safeguarding children, including tackling child sexual exploitation. This cannot be done alone and requires the cooperation of the wider community and our partner agencies. Councils can use their links with police, schools, health professionals, and community and faith groups to highlight the signs and ensure people know where to turn if they have concerns. A councillor's duty towards children who fall victim to child sexual exploitation in whatever form, is part of their safeguarding responsibility.

All Councillors should take an informed and active interest in how the Council supports children and young people as this can be a very vulnerable group. It requires ownership and leadership and particularly partnership working at a senior level and this includes **all** elected members.

Councils also have corporate parenting responsibilities for those children who are 'looked after' and there are clear responsibilities which need to translate into practical actions. For children and young people, who may or may not be 'looked after' by the council but who are victims of CSE, councils have a duty to also ensure that these children have their needs properly attended to. The research shows us that self esteem and vulnerability are huge issues for these children, whatever their age.

## So thinking about CSE, what would a good parent do?

- feeds, shelters, clothes, cuddles, nurtures
- senses and adjusts to each child's unique nature
- fosters healthy growth and development, friendships, and confidence in relationships
- protects, sets boundaries, and mends when things go wrong
- conveys positive values and principles for living
- ensures a good education and opportunities to develop skills, talents and interests, encouraging taking measured risks
- supports the about-to-be young adult into taking growing responsibilities and enjoying growing freedoms.

The Council must task and equip people to do these things and carry out all necessary actions on its behalf, ensuring that they are done, and done well enough.

Again, individuals and organisations are key in achieving the right response to victims of CSE and inevitably, responsibilities for each child are spread over a number of people. So there is potential for breakdowns in communications with things falling between stools. It happens in the best of families, and it is a greater risk between organisations. It is why planned, coordinated and effective teamwork is so vital, along with the checks and balances. We talk more about these checks later on in this resource.

## What is Child Sexual Exploitation?

It is a form of Child Sexual Abuse that can have a serious long-term impact on every aspect of their lives. It also damages the lives of families and carers and can lead to family break-ups.

The 'All Wales Protocol for Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of children who are at risk of abuse through Sexual Exploitation' (2) revised in 2013 defines CSE as:

*Child sexual exploitation is the coercion or manipulation of children and young people into taking part in sexual activities. It is a form of sexual abuse involving an exchange of some form of payment which can include money, mobile phones and other items, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, 'protection' or affection. The vulnerability of the young person and grooming process employed by perpetrators renders them powerless to recognise the exploitative nature of relationships and unable to give informed consent.*

This definition highlights the power of the perpetrator over the young person they are exploiting. Victims are manipulated into believing that they are making an informed choice or consenting to engage in abusive relationships. Members need to understand that apparent 'consent' to the relationship by the victim carries no weight; blame clearly rests with the perpetrators who exploit the vulnerabilities of children and young people.

The main characteristics of CSE can, therefore, be summed up as:

- the manipulation of children and young people into sexual activities;
- the perpetrator has power over the victim;
- the perpetrator will often use violence and/or intimidation;
- the perpetrator exchanges material and/or emotional gifts e.g. money, affection, for sexual favours;
- the victim is vulnerable in one or more ways;
- the victim is unable to see that she/he is being groomed;
- the victim may appear to agree to the relationship.

## How much of a problem is child sexual exploitation in Wales?

It is difficult to be certain about the true nature and scale of CSE in Wales as definitions and perceptions have changed, but we can be certain it is happening in Wales as it is in other parts of the UK. It is not limited to any particular geography, ethnic or social background. Research by Barnado's in Wales over the last 10 years shows that there were significantly more known cases of children and young people being sexually exploited in 2013/14 than in 2005. More children and young people are also being identified as being at significant risk of CSE.

As CSE is predominantly a hidden issue and, historically, very few survivors speak out about their abuse, it is still difficult to predict the true scale of the problem. Often CSE victims do not realise the abusive nature of their relationship with perpetrators and may feel complicit in the abuse as they believe they are being rewarded in some way. Some are also reluctant to speak out about their abuse for fear of being criminalised or not believed. We know from research that boys are less likely than girls to disclose experiences of CSE making it more difficult to detect.

Emerging interactive technologies are also providing new opportunities for perpetrators to groom children online making it even harder to measure prevalence accurately. Children can easily be manipulated and groomed into developing relationships with well organised perpetrators. They use sophisticated methods to steer victims into engaging in inappropriate sexual chat, sexual activity over a webcam or posting indecent images of themselves, often without any initial gain or payment. These exploitative relationships can quickly run out of control for young people who, having compromised themselves online, are often threatened and blackmailed. Online relationships can also have serious off-line consequences particularly when children and young people are encouraged to meet up with people in the real world who they first met online.

*Information was received from Police stating that mother had contacted them to report messages she found on TJ's phone from a male neighbour who is 29 years old, which read:*

*'I WILL RING U NOW BUT DON'T TELL ANYONE WHO IT IS LOL BUT IF U CAN ANSWER JUST CUT ME OFF XX' Mother reported she looked at TJ's phone and stated that there had been a number of calls from this neighbour's phone number, some were late at night but the majority were during the evening hours. Other messages noted were, "TAKE THEM OFF AND WEAR A BELLY TOP AND STUFF...SO THAT YOU CAN SHOW SOME FLESH"*

## What do you need to know about Child Sexual Exploitation?

- a) CSE happens when perpetrators entice and groom children and young people into exploitative situations, contact and relationships.
- b) The child may receive “gifts” like food, accommodation, alcohol, affection, in return for performing sexual activities. This disguises the power imbalance which very much favours the perpetrator over the victim.
- c) This power imbalance in the relationship usually comes about through the advantages which the perpetrator can exercise in terms of age, gender, intellect, physical strength and resources, which are exploitative and unhealthy for victims.
- d) Boys and young men as well as girls and young women are exploited. In some cases, women are perpetrators but it is usually linked to male violence to women and girls.
- e) Sexually exploited children should not be regarded as criminals and the primary law enforcement response must be directed at disrupting perpetrators and holding them to account, not victims.
- f) CSE is not perpetrated exclusively by adults. Young people can also be perpetrators; and young perpetrators may also be victims.
- g) CSE occurs in both urban and rural areas of Wales with victims and perpetrators coming from a range of ethnic and social backgrounds.
- h) Research tells us that some groups of young people are particularly vulnerable to CSE. These include children and young people who:
  - have a history of running away or of going missing from home;
  - have special needs
  - have disengaged from education
  - are in or leaving care
  - are migrant children and young people
  - are unaccompanied asylum seeking children
  - are abusing drugs and alcohol
  - are involved in gangs



## What should Councils be doing?

### **a) Work closely with other agencies**

Councils remain the lead statutory agency for safeguarding children but they cannot do it alone. It requires properly co-ordinated multi-agency working and engagement with local communities. Such collaborative working should target preventative measures e.g. by reducing risk taking behaviour by children and young people, as well as supporting the victims of CSE.

### **b) Share information**

Councils need to agree to share CSE data consistently and establish the mechanisms and protocols for doing so. Sharing data helps to inform the strategic and operational responses to CSE across regions.

### **c) Exercise their responsibilities as corporate parents**

Recent experiences of Councils in England such as Rotherham, Oxford, Sheffield and Derby highlight the fundamental role that Council Leaders, lead Members of Children's Services, scrutiny committees and all Members as corporate parents have in raising questions and challenge in respect of CSE in their local area.

### **d) Understand and effectively scrutinise the Council's response to CSE**

In order to ask the right questions of officers and the executive, Members need to understand what is happening in their area, be aware of strategic and operational CSE plans and the impact these are having on improving awareness of CSE and addressing the issues. Dealing effectively with CSE requires a holistic understanding of its complexities. Since this entails working with different agencies, governance and oversight issues need to be resolved with partners through shared plans and forums. Members should be questioning the extent to which this is happening within their local area.

NB: You can be an effective corporate parent without having to know individual children who are or have been victims of CSE. Personal contact on an individual basis is not generally appropriate, although children and young people, as any local resident, can choose to contact or visit their local Councillor/s. It is vital always to avoid compromising either yourself or a child by meeting in circumstances which could be misinterpreted. It will usually help to have a responsible and trusted adult along to facilitate any meeting

## What are the key questions that elected members need to ask?

1. What data do we collect?
2. Is it the right data?
3. What does it tell us?

It is important that data is routinely captured in order to:

- ensure strategic and operational plans reflect local and regional CSE priorities;
- identify local trends and map the profile of CSE;
- develop victim and offender profiles;
- Identify children and young people deemed to be at risk;
- identify geographical hotspots and vulnerable localities;
- determine, as far as possible, the scale of online child exploitation.

1. Do we have an effective local CSE plan?
2. How does it link with regional and national plans?

- Members need to be assured that local and regional CSE plans and strategies are working effectively in practice and that they are regularly reviewed and updated.
- Members should seek assurance that regional CSE plans dovetail with the Welsh Governments' CSE National Action Plan and that there are processes in place to ensure that plans are clearly communicated across all agencies.

## Role of Safeguarding Children's Boards

Safeguarding Children Boards (SCB) in Wales have a key role to play in coordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of the work of their members and must act in accordance with legislation and statutory guidance issued by Welsh Government in carrying out their functions. SCBs should ensure that the needs of children and young people, and their families, who have been or may be sexually exploited have been considered when planning and commissioning local services. CSE should be addressed in the SCB's strategic and operational planning and reporting mechanisms. CSE should also be considered in local and regional needs assessments and, where it is a significant issue, the SCB should ensure CSE is regarded as a strategic priority for the Board.

1. Do those who need to know about CSE have the right levels of training, skills and resources?
2. Are all adults who work with children carefully screened before appointment and is their practice supervised?

- All practitioners who regularly work with children and young people at risk of CSE should have a good understanding of the issue, its impact on victims, know how to spot the signs and respond appropriately. Practitioners also need to understand and respond to young people who engage in risk taking behaviours.
- Apart from those who work with children e.g. teachers, social workers, health care staff, youth workers, others who may come into contact with children and young people should be considered for training e.g. licensing officers, hotel staff and publicans.

1. How far are our families and communities aware of the signs and dangers of CSE?
2. Do they know what to do if they suspect CSE is happening?

Key to preventing CSE is the need to raise awareness among young people of the risks associated with exploitative relationships and to make them feel they can report concerns.

1. What are we doing to prevent children and young people from being exploited sexually?
2. What evaluation / monitoring is in place to ensure effectiveness of approaches?
3. Has this Council learnt any lessons from failings and successes elsewhere?
4. Are all allegations of abuse thoroughly investigated and is appropriate action taken?
5. How good is our partnership working in combating CSE?

- No single agency can address CSE in isolation. It requires effective partnership working and professional multi-agency collaborative approaches to address the issue. Examples of approaches taken in Wales include:
  - Introduction of multi-agency CSE lead practitioner forums
  - Development of multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASH) or smaller CSE specific multi-agency teams
  - SCBs establishing CSE sub-groups

1. What information are we already collecting, e.g. through the Corporate Parenting Panel and are links being made with this information?
2. Are we alert to cases of children and young people who go missing?
3. How safe do children for whom we have responsibility themselves feel and do they think more could be done to keep them safe?
4. Are effective steps taken to understand why our children went missing, what risks they ran and how to prevent it happening again?
5. How do we deal with these cases and avoid them becoming cases of CSE?

- Council scrutiny and corporate parenting panels have a crucial role in holding children's safeguarding agencies and partnerships to account. In doing so, they should regularly receive reports on and challenge the effectiveness of local and regional work being undertaken to address CSE.