

**Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board**

**Child Sexual Exploitation Prevention Strategy**

Contents

[Foreword 3](#_Toc496191520)

[National Context 4](#_Toc496191521)

[Purpose 5](#_Toc496191522)

[Strategic Context 5](#_Toc496191523)

[Aim 6](#_Toc496191524)

[How we will understand the scale of CSE across Western Bay 6](#_Toc496191525)

[How we will raise awareness, identify and protect those who are vulnerable and prevent CSE. 6](#_Toc496191526)

[How we will support victims as well as disrupt and prosecute perpetrators 7](#_Toc496191527)

[How we will measure our performance. 7](#_Toc496191528)

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## Foreword

Child Sexual exploitation (CSE) is a criminal act that has a devastating impact upon children and young people and has an increasing national profile following significant investigations which have led to prosecutions. At the national level there has been a tendency to assume CSE has an impact upon very small numbers of children in particular locations. However, recent national reviews of its prevalence have concluded that there will be children and young people at risk and being abused in most local authority areas.

This strategy sets out the commitment of Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board (WBSCB) and its stakeholders to tackle (CSE) in a co-ordinated, multi – agency and strategic manner, and to support victims in mitigating the impact of CSE.

The strategy is endorsed by all professionals and organisations in contact with or providing services to children and young people in Western Bay (whether in a statutory or voluntary capacity), in order to identify, support and equip professionals to effectively safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people affected by CSE, and to encourage a culture of professional challenge in order to effectively address the complex issues that CSE involves.

Young people who are victims of sexual exploitation require comprehensive, long term support, often into adulthood. This strategy will, where concerns arise, ensure that support is provided at the earliest opportunity.

**Chair of WBSCB**

## National Context

Definition

The All Wales Protocol Safeguarding Children and Young People at Risk of Sexual Exploitation provides a definition for child sexual exploitation (CSE).

***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.***

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a particularly hidden form of abuse. The majority of the evidence gathered in relation to this issue has taken place elsewhere in the UK and until recently very little was known about the prevalence and nature of child sexual exploitation in Wales.

In 2005 Barnardo’s Cymru undertook a scoping study on behalf of the Wales Advisory Group on Child Sexual Exploitation. The scoping study identified 184 cases of children and young people across Wales who were identified as being sexually exploited or where there were concerns that they were being sexually exploited. The study also identified a lack of awareness of CSE among professionals and lack of identification of risk, suggesting that the figure of 184 represented an under-estimate of actual prevalence rates. The study also suggested that there were inconsistencies in Local Authority responses to CSE.

The Welsh Assembly Government responded to recommendations included in the scoping study report and commissioned a review of the content and implementation of local protocols for CSE across Wales. The review was carried out in 2006-07 and provided evidence to confirm the findings of the earlier scoping study.

The review identified a general lack of awareness about the content of local protocols and of associated procedures for responding to child sexual exploitation across agencies.

Awareness of the risk indicators of, and issues associated with, child sexual exploitation was limited beyond small groups of strategic officers or practitioners who had a good working knowledge and were committed to addressing this issue. Examples of consistent multi-agency working were limited and a need for multi-agency training was identified by the majority of respondents. There was wide variation in the content of local CSE safeguarding protocols, some included information that was incorrect, and there was no shared definition of CSE. Seven protocols included provision for the prosecution of children and young people, whilst only one of these described the prosecution of children as an absolute last resort.

The presence of multiple vulnerabilities and risks in the lives of children and young people at significant risk of sexual exploitation, and the behaviours associated with abuse through sexual exploitation, equate to high resource demands on a number of agencies often in response to symptomatic and frequent crisis situations.

Early identification by agencies, that are in contact with vulnerable children and young people, and prevention through safeguarding actions appropriate to the level of risk are key to reducing the number of children and young people who are abused through CSE.

Policy and Guidance in Wales has consistently required Local Authorities to take steps to understand and take action to address the issue of CSE in their area. In March 2016 Welsh Government launched the National Action Plan which sets expectations on Local Authorities to have a strategy in place to tackle the sexual exploitation of children. This strategy is aligned to the National Action Plan and is consistent with the key messages set out in it.

## Purpose

The strategy sets out the commitment of partners in Western Bay to do everything possible to prevent child sexual exploitation (CSE), protect and support those affected by CSE and tackle perpetrators.

A coordinated, proactive, multi- agency approach is essential to fulfil the overarching outcomes of the strategy and those of the National Plan:

* **Prepare** children, families, communities and professionals to spot children at risk
* **Prevent** harm
* **Protect** victims and
* **Pursue,** disrupt and prosecute perpetrators

This strategy and implementation plan demonstrates how partners in Western Bay will to work together to identify CSE wherever it takes place and limit the impact on children and families.

## Strategic Context

It is important to see this strategy in the context of strategic policy development nationally and regionally. The Welsh Government, the Children’s Commissioner and the Police and Crime Commissioner have prepared strategic positions or plans. The National Independent Safeguarding Board also have a role in shaping and influencing the overall strategic direction in relation to CSE. This strategy for Western Bay has taken these wider developments into account to minimise any divergence of approach overall.

The Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board has agreed it is a strategic priority for board partners to build and take forward a range of interventions and developments in the short to medium term. As such this strategy should not be read as a final or completed document but rather as an evolving development that will be kept under active review by WBSCB.

## Aim

This strategy will set out how we will:

* **Understand** the scale of the problem
* **Raise awareness** of the issue through education and training
* **Identify** those at risk and provide early support to prevent exploitation and abuse
* **Protect** children who are affected by following the AWCPP
* **Support** victims to break away from sexual exploitation and recover from their experiences
* **Disrupt** and **prosecute** perpetrators
* Respond to the Safeguarding Boards Business Plan and Strategic Priority; ‘Exploitation’

## How we will understand the scale of CSE across Western Bay

CSE has been a priority for WBSCB since its establishment in 2013and long before it became a National Headline across the UK. As the focus across the UK turned towards CSE the WBSCB proactively escalated this as its number one priority to ensure that the Board was doing everything it could to understand prevalence, interventions and safeguarding services for young people at risk of CSE.

WBSCB can be confident through data analysis and reporting that it is achieving the requirements from the All Wales CSE Protocol to actively enquire about CSE activity, that the protocol is applied consistently and training is being delivered to identify and address activity. The Board regularly scrutinises performance data to hold partner agencies to account.

The Western Bay Safeguarding Children Board is committed to enabling children and young people to directly influence and shape policy and recognises that nowhere is this more significant than in relation to CSE. By drawing directly on the experiences of children and young people who have been abused or threatened by CSE, it assists in understanding how perpetrators operate and improve the effectiveness of agency interventions.

## How we will raise awareness, identify and protect those who are vulnerable and prevent CSE.

**Children and Young People** – Equip young people to keep themselves safe by delivering an education programme to raise awareness of CSE through services such as schools and youth service. This will include information and the provision of web based tools or apps around being safe and happy in the online environment.

**Parents, Carers and Professionals** – Equip parents, carers, professionals and communities to identify children who may be vulnerable to CSE by raising their awareness of the key signs of vulnerability and what they should do when they are concerned through variety of forums.

**Communities** – Engage with the community so that they are able to identify children who are showing signs of vulnerability and risk and know how they can access support.

**Effective Leadership** - Identified professionals in key agencies (Children’s Services, police, Education, Health, Sexual Health Services, Youth Service and Youth Offending Service) act as a source of expertise within their own agencies, collate essential data and represent their organisations.

**Professional Responsibility** – Professionals understand their responsibility to identify children who are vulnerable or at risk, including through sharing information, to ensure children and young people are given the right support to build resilience and protect them from sexual exploitation.

**Multi-Agency Training –** Develop a multi-agency training plan to deliver to all levels of partner agencies to raise their awareness of signs of vulnerability and risk, information on local hot-spots and promote an integrated approach to children and young people at risk. Also provide training within areas of the private sector such as taxi drivers, hotels and the night time economy.

**Promote Effective Risk Assessment** – Utilise the Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Framework (SERAF and associated CSE services from third sector partners such as Barnardos and NSPCC.

**Risk Management** – Multi-agency forums to identify links between victims, perpetrators and locations to develop a shared understanding of risk profile and thresholds.

**Provide evidence of compliance with legislation and guidance** – Partner Agencies provide a data set to WBSCB to show compliance with legislation and guidance.

**Share Good Practice** – Where good practice is identified, enable professionals to share good practice and promote an integrated approach to CSE.

## How we will support victims as well as disrupt and prosecute perpetrators

Continue to provide a coordinated, strategic response to CSE which will support victims as well as identify, disrupt and prosecute perpetrators of CSE. We will draw on innovative practice from around the country and ensure agencies work with the CPS and courts to learn how prosecution rates can be improved.

## How we will measure our performance.

The measures of our success will be set out as clear tasks in the WBSBs Business Plan as well as the Quality Monitoring Performance Impact Framework. Progress on implementing this strategy will be reviewed quarterly.