



**Westmorland and Furness  
Safeguarding Children  
Partnership**

# **Child Sexual Abuse Strategy**

Prevention, identification  
and response

**June 2026 –  
June 2028**



# 1. Introduction and purpose

Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership (WFSCP) is governed by [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026](#), which requires safeguarding partners to publish clear Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. These arrangements set out how partners work together as a single safeguarding system to help, protect and promote the welfare of all children. Effective multi agency collaboration is therefore a statutory responsibility and a critical foundation for protecting children from harm, including all forms of child sexual abuse (CSA).

This strategy sets out WFSCP's partnership approach to preventing child sexual abuse, identifying risk earlier, supporting children and families, disrupting perpetrators and strengthening workforce confidence. It provides a clear, evidence informed framework supported by a multi agency action plan owned by the Child Sexual Abuse Working Group and reviewed quarterly.

The National report ['I wanted them all to notice'](#) was commissioned by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel to explore the challenges in identifying, assessing and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment. It draws on rapid reviews and serious case reviews received by the Panel between 2018 and 2023.

The findings and recommendations from the report, include:

- The importance of speaking to and listening to children
- The need to understand parents' vulnerabilities and challenges
- The need for robust risk assessments
- How to effectively respond to concerns of intrafamilial sexual abuse

## 1.1 Definition of Child Sexual Abuse

Working Together 2026, defines child sexual abuse as:

...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 in family settings, in institutional settings, online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. Child sexual abuse material available online may have been generated in a family environment. Online abuse can also take the form of cyber grooming or self-generated sexual content under coercion. Sexual abuse is not solely perpetrated by adult males. Women can also commit acts of sexual abuse, as can other children. A child of any age or gender can be a victim of sexual abuse<sup>1</sup>.

## 1.2 Definition of Harmful Sexual Behaviour

Harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) is defined by Hackett (2014) as developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people which is harmful or abusive.

<sup>1</sup>Working Together 2026, page 162

## 2. Local and Regional Context

Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership uses local and national intelligence to understand the nature, scale and characteristics of child sexual abuse (CSA) affecting children in Westmorland and Furness. This includes evidence on forms of abuse, key vulnerabilities, local data from statutory agencies and learning from national reviews. These insights inform our prevention, identification and response activity.

### 2.1 Local and National Data on Child Sexual Abuse

Evidence clearly tells us that child sexual abuse is under reported and that abuse is often not disclosed at the time it is happening. We know many more children experience sexual abuse than those who are identified by services, with disclosures more likely to be made after the abuse has occurred.

Identifying the true picture of child sexual abuse both locally and nationally is challenging, victims and survivors of abuse may be unable to disclose the abuse they experience, under identification by services, and barriers experienced by certain groups may also prevent disclosure. The centre of expertise on child sexual abuse reports only 1 in 8 victims comes to the attention of the authorities at the time.



## 3. Shared vision and strategic objectives

### Aim: Effective identification and response to child sexual abuse

Westmorland and Furness Safeguarding Children Partnership recognise the complexity of child sexual abuse and are committed to working together in partnership to fulfilling the below priorities.

Wherever possible, identifying child sexual abuse at the earliest opportunity, and responding consistently and effectively across all agencies. Equality, diversity and the voice of the child is central to the implementation of our strategy.

**Priority 1: Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse** - We aim to have strong system leadership across Westmorland and Furness in bringing about change in the identification of and response to Child Sexual Abuse. We aim to have a confident workforce with appropriate knowledge, skills and time to effectively identify and respond to concerns of child sexual abuse. Professionals will understand the role and function of all agencies across the partnership and will communicate effectively across agency to reduce the risk. This includes Family Hubs as an accessible community-based provision supporting earlier identification, engagement and delivery of preventative and therapeutic interventions.

**Priority 2: Protection, Identification and Response** - We aim to consistently identify children at risk of or experiencing child sexual abuse across Westmorland and Furness robustly identifying risks, sharing intelligence across partners, and safeguarding children in familial and extra-familial (contextual) settings. We will ensure the right professionals are present at the right time for the child. We aim to intervene early and respond appropriately using evidence based tools to improve professional curiosity and recognition of child sexual abuse. Strategically influencing services, based on local needs and lived experience.

**Priority 3: Justice** - Partners will work collaboratively to strengthen single agency responses to child sexual abuse. Identify and share intelligence to pursue and disrupt child sexual abuse; seeking justice for the child. Ensure appropriate responses and support from specialist services to those affected by child sexual abuse.

**Priority 4: Support** - We aim to provide high-quality, trauma-informed therapeutic interventions and support for children, families and their carers. We will foster a culture of multi-agency support for staff.

The delivery of the strategy will be underpinned by the Child Sexual Abuse Policy and a multi-agency action plan.

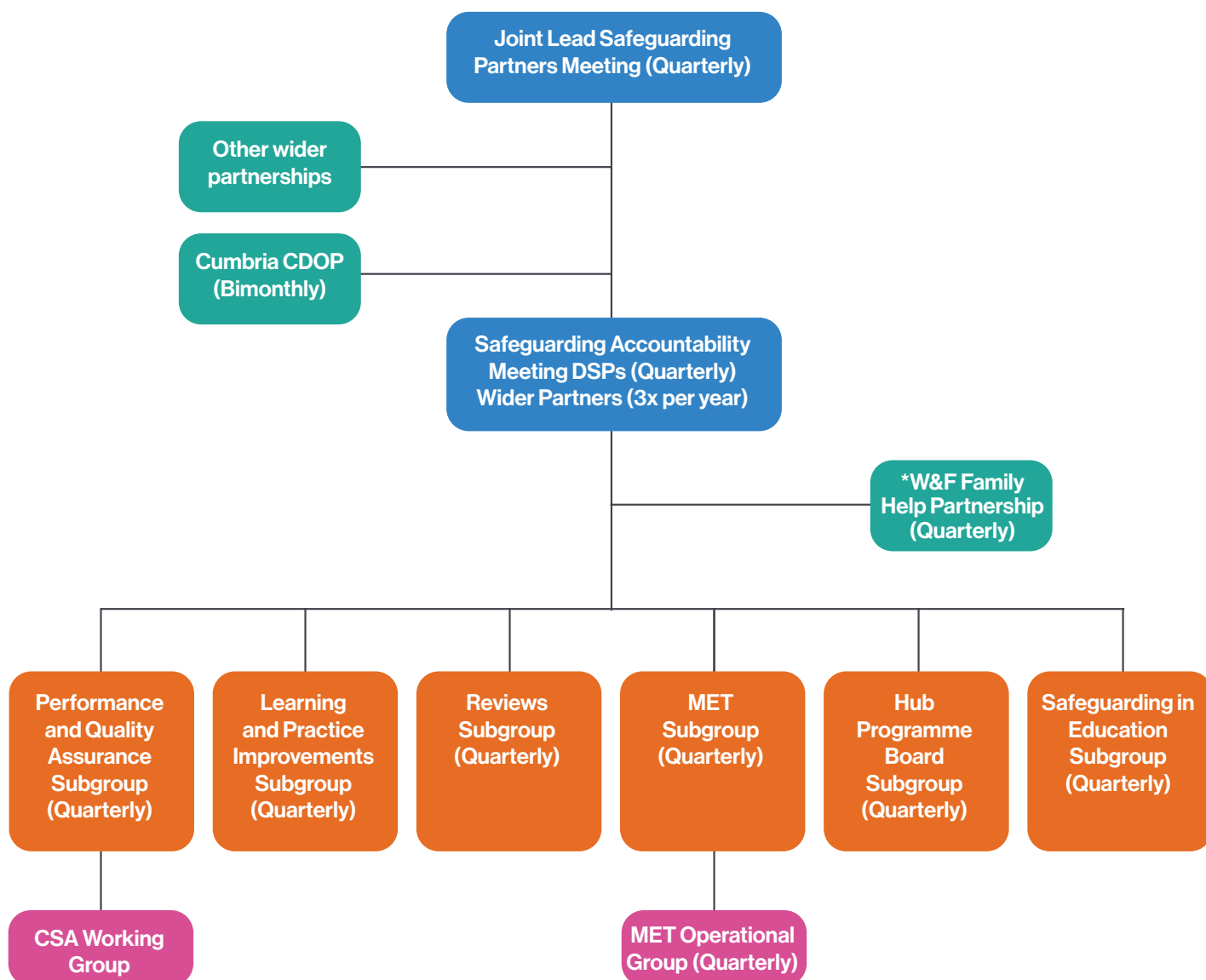
## 4. Multi-Agency Governance and Partnership

### Aim: Effective multi-agency working together

Governance arrangements for WFSCP are detailed within our [Multi agency safeguarding arrangements](#) and on the [WFSCP website](#).

Delivery of this Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) Strategy and Action Plan is overseen by a multi agency Child Sexual Abuse Working Group. The group reports to the Performance and Quality Assurance Subgroup, providing scrutiny of progress, impact and learning. Clear links are maintained with the Missing, Exploited and Trafficked Subgroup to ensure effective oversight of abuse and exploitation outside the home. The Review Subgroup retains responsibility for responding to national learning, including "I Wanted Them All to Notice", while the Learning and Practice Improvement Subgroup ensures that child sexual abuse related training, policies and procedures remain current. There is also connectivity from the Child Sexual Abuse Working Group up to the Family Help Partnership Board, in order that we maintain a preventative approach to child sexual abuse.

Independent scrutiny is provided through the Partnership Quality Assurance Framework. The Independent Scrutineer offers assurance on the effectiveness of the strategy through scrutiny, performance monitoring, audit activity, training needs analysis and oversight of the Child Sexual Abuse Action Plan.



**Shared responsibility** - The partnership will define clear roles for statutory partners, including education, with a clear intent to ensure multi-agency ownership of the strategy, which enables all partner agencies and organisations to both contribute to developments and to hold each other to account. We will align strategic priorities across partners to ensure consistency and coherence in safeguarding practice.

**Multi-agency team response** - strengthen operational coordination, ensuring timely, child-centred and trauma informed interventions.

Establish co-ordinated case management that includes forensic interviewing, medical examinations and mental health services in a child-centred environment.

**Information sharing protocols** - Develop robust systems for timely sharing of concerns to promote early intervention and protection of children who are at risk of abuse.

## 5. Workforce Development

### Aim – A confident and skilled workforce

**Joint training** - Develop and deliver a multi-agency training programme to ensure a common language and shared understanding of child sexual abuse.

**Learning from Experience** - Review and scrutinise the strategy based on feedback from children with lived experience. Ensure the lived experience of our children is central to our partnership response to child sexual abuse.

A dedicated [CSA section on the WFSCP](#) website provides practitioners with guidance, resources and relevant links.

## 6. Quality Assurance

### Aim – Systems of leadership and accountability

**Quality Assurance Framework** - Embed accountability and transparency through robust governance, scrutiny and performance monitoring, policy and process review and development to ensure they are effective and remain up to date.

## 7. Next Steps

Next steps will be:

- Launch and embed the Child Sexual Abuse Strategy
- Develop and implement multi agency Child Sexual Abuse Policy
- Develop and implement multi agency Child Sexual Abuse Action Plan

The strategy sets out our overall ambition and what we are trying to achieve in relation to Child Sexual Abuse. A policy will be developed, which will sit underneath the strategy, this will explain the expectations, responsibilities and processes which should be followed; in other words, what we will do and how we will do it.

The toolkit will then provide the practical resources, guidance and tools that staff use to put this into practice day to day.



