

Tackling Child Sexual Abuse Strategy

2021



HM Government

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Home Secretary Foreword



Throughout my career in politics, I have campaigned relentlessly for the victims of crime. I firmly believe that we have a duty to protect and support those who are targeted, exploited and harmed by criminals. I am absolutely clear that keeping our children safe is one of the State's most fundamental roles. And, as Home Secretary, it is a responsibility that I take extremely seriously.

Across the United Kingdom and the world, children are subjected to horrific sexual abuse which has a devastating impact on their lives. I have seen at first-hand how our National Crime Agency is targeting the most heinous online offender networks engaged in the rape and torture of children. I have spoken to victims and communities ravaged by groups of predators in towns and cities across the country, where high-profile investigations have exposed child sexual abuse on a truly shocking scale. This has only hardened my resolve to do all we can to support police and other frontline professionals to bring offenders to justice and support the victims and survivors. Cases like those in Rotherham are a stain on this country's conscience – and they must be acted on. In the past, a culture of denial that failed to recognise that offenders exist in all parts of society emboldened those committing these heinous crimes. We must never let this happen again. I will do everything in my power to ensure we learn the lessons of the past – and we will leave no stone unturned in our fight to root out the perpetrators and protect children from these abhorrent crimes.

To tackle child sexual abuse in all its forms, we need everyone to play their part. That is why I am delivering a national strategy to drive action across every part of Government, across all agencies, all sectors, charities, communities, technology companies and society more widely. As the first strategy of its kind, this will be our blueprint for relentlessly pursuing abusers whilst placing victims and survivors at the heart of our approach.

The UK has a proud record as the global leader in tackling child sexual abuse. Yet despite progress in drawing this devastating abuse out of the shadows, in safeguarding children and in supporting victims and survivors, we owe it to those impacted by these crimes to do more to stop them from happening in the first place. It is vital that we disrupt all forms of offending and provide victims and survivors with the support they need to rebuild their lives – whether that abuse is within the family, organised by criminal networks, within institutions, or orchestrated by those hiding online.

I will not tolerate these crimes, whether they take place at home, in communities or online. I am absolutely clear that those who abuse children remotely from across the world should not be treated with any less seriousness than those who abuse children in person.

We know that COVID-19 has had a profound impact on our society. The pandemic has created significant challenges for frontline services, and measures implemented to stop the spread of the virus have potentially increased the risk of child sexual abuse online and within the home.

This Strategy recognises those issues and the Government has acted swiftly to mitigate the risks. The additional £30 million of funding announced in the 2020 spending round, continuing 2019's funding uplift, reflects our unwavering commitment to bolstering our response to child sexual abuse.

Above all, this Strategy sends out a clear message to those who abuse our children: if you think you can access child abuse imagery with impunity, groom children, abuse positions of trust – think again, you will pay for your crimes. We are investing in the best technology, best intelligence and best law enforcement capabilities. We will find you and we will bring you to justice. And to victims, survivors and those at-risk – we will hear your voice, we will protect you and we will ensure you get the support you need.



Priti Patel
Home Secretary

Executive Summary

This ground-breaking Strategy sets out the Government's ambition to prevent, tackle and respond to all forms of child sexual abuse. It focuses on three key objectives which overlap and reinforce one another, recognising the complex, interconnected nature of this crime and the whole-system response it requires. The objectives outlined are not set out in order of prioritisation. All three are inextricably linked and we will drive all three forward with the same focus to protect children, tackle offending and support all victims and survivors.

We will hold ourselves to account and learn from data and insight gathered across the system to demonstrably show that we are:

- Drawing these hidden crimes out of the shadows by identifying more abuse and safeguarding more children through police recorded crime, children's social care data and independent inspectorate reports;
- Bringing more offenders to justice and increasing effective trials for child sexual abuse, based on data from across the criminal justice system;
- Improving the quality and availability of support for victims and survivors, drawing on insight from delivery and third sector partners; and,
- Preventing these terrible crimes from happening in the first place based on law enforcement threat assessments and survey data from the Office of National Statistics.

Objective 1. Tackling all forms of child sexual abuse and bringing offenders to justice

1. **To reduce the threat of child sexual abuse, the Home Office will ensure law enforcement, intelligence agencies and relevant departments collaborate and coordinate their work effectively**, making the best use of our collective resources to relentlessly pursue offenders. The National Crime Agency (NCA) will continue to lead the law enforcement operational response, in partnership with the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC).
2. Using increased Home Office investment, we will draw together data and insight from across law enforcement, intelligence agencies, industry and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to uncover the full scale and true nature of child sexual abuse, **enabling all partners combatting this crime to target interventions effectively and tackle the highest-harm offenders**.
3. **The Home Office will build the capacity of law enforcement at local, regional and national levels**, overcoming the barriers to progressing child sexual abuse cases by investing to process the backlogs in digital forensic evidence faster to identify more victims and offenders. These efforts are reinforced by wider improvements to the criminal justice system through an additional 20,000 police officers, 10,000 prison spaces and investment of £85 million in the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

4. **The Home Office will ensure law enforcement and intelligence agencies have the right tools and legal powers to combat this crime**, by improving law enforcement's understanding and response to vulnerability through delivery of the [National Vulnerability Action Plan](#), as well as exploring new or updated powers and civil orders to tackle offending.
5. **Our goal is to ensure there are no safe spaces online for offenders to abuse and exploit children**. Across the NCA, Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), National Cyber Force (NCF) and wider law enforcement, the Home Office will invest in the development of new technological capabilities to bring more technically sophisticated offenders to justice and help our partners identify and safeguard more victims and survivors. This includes enhancing the use of the UK's world-leading Child Abuse Image Database (CAID).
6. **To bring more offenders to justice, we will work across Government to improve the criminal justice system response to all forms of sexual abuse**, challenging myths around this type of offending, updating guidance for prosecutors and training them on the impact of trauma on memory. We will ensure victims and survivors going through the court process are treated appropriately and work to increase the number of effective trials for child sexual abuse cases.
7. **We will equip local agencies to develop place-based strategies that respond to threats within their communities, such as group-based child sexual exploitation**. Building on the findings of our recent policy paper on group-based offending, we will engage with criminal justice partners, academics, think tanks, charities and frontline professionals on improving the range, quality and analysis of data collected. Through investments in police intelligence and analysis of exploitation, we will improve government policy and inform local level responses. This is alongside enhancing our Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit, and supporting community engagement to improve safety in public places, deter offenders and encourage reporting by bystanders.

Objective 2. Preventing offending and re-offending

8. **The Home Office will work to deter individuals from abusive behaviour whenever possible**, investing in evidence-based public education campaigns that can prevent offending by providing advice and information to potential offenders and those close to them. We will also develop our understanding of offender motivations and pathways, using evidence-led interventions to stop these crimes.
9. **We will protect victims and survivors and the wider public through stronger sentencing commensurate with offenders' crimes**, making sure serious sexual and violent offenders remain in prison longer, as outlined in the White Paper [A Smarter Approach to Sentencing](#) led by the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).
10. **We will seek to prevent re-offending through our extensive reforms to probation and actions to strengthen management of sex offenders**, including more effective training of prison and probation staff, risk assessment and deployment of interventions.

11. **The Home Office will ensure that police management of registered sex offenders (RSOs) in the community is as effective as possible under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)**, including detection of offending and reoffending. Management of RSOs in the community will be made more robust by giving law enforcement the power to apply positive conditions on offenders' actions through civil orders, as well as piloting technology to help law enforcement identify re-offending online.
12. **The MoJ and its key partners in offender management will improve multi-agency working and information sharing so that services work together better to protect children from harm**, including enhancing the MAPPA information database used to manage offenders, as well as strengthening safeguarding standards in prisons and probation.

Objective 3. Protecting and safeguarding children and young people, and supporting all victims and survivors

13. **We will improve the information provided to parents, carers and the wider public about child sexual abuse**, deploying Government communications and reviewing Sarah's Law (the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme), so that key adults are empowered with the advice and tools they need to identify risk and keep children safe from sexual abuse.
14. **We will educate children and young people about healthy relationships and the digital world**, including through the roll-out of Relationships, Sex and Health Education and the Media Literacy Strategy. For those who may be at increased risk, **we will provide targeted support that protects children and young people from offenders seeking to exploit their vulnerabilities**, including through the Home Office-led Trusted Relationships Fund, and the Troubled Families Programme.
15. **Recognising the profound impact of COVID-19 and measures to prevent its spread, the Government will continue to prioritise the welfare of children in our response.** This means putting in place additional support for children and teaching staff to enable children to be educated safely during this period, as well as helping local and third sector partners support vulnerable children and families whose situations may have been made more difficult by the pandemic.
16. **The Home Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will reduce the prevalence of online child sexual abuse and make the UK the safest place in the world to be online through the forthcoming Online Harms framework**, instigating a new statutory duty of care for tech companies and driving the adoption of an interim voluntary code of practice to ensure companies take action to improve the safety of all their users, especially children.
17. **To prevent child sexual abuse in local areas the Government will improve safeguarding standards in institutions and out-of-school settings**, making sure that the places where children and young people spend their time are safe, and continuing

Home Office funding for the Children's Society's Prevention Programme to help local and regional agencies better understand and prevent child exploitation.

18. Too often, child sexual abuse goes undetected. **The Government will strive to ensure professionals working with children have the skills and information they need to recognise and respond appropriately to all forms of child sexual abuse**, so that more children and young people are identified and get the support they need. We will help safeguarding partners to work together by continuing improvements to new multiagency safeguarding arrangements and expanding the Child Protection Information Sharing System.
19. **Continuing the UK's role as the world leader in tackling child sexual abuse, we will strengthen the international response and protect children overseas by driving common global standards and enhancing safeguarding and law enforcement systems in key at-risk countries.** In response to individuals who travel overseas to sexually abuse vulnerable children, we will invest in the NCA's international capability and maximise the use of existing powers, such as civil order restrictions and notification of foreign authorities in order to disrupt perpetrators' activities and bring them to justice.
20. **We will help victims and survivors of recent and non-recent child sexual abuse to rebuild their lives by improving the support available and developing and embedding best practice**, including boosting investment in specialist sexual violence support services delivered by the voluntary sector, Sexual Assault Referral Centres and the Child Sexual Abuse Support Services Transformation Fund. We will raise awareness of support for victims and survivors and provide local commissioners with the resources to meet their needs wherever they live in the country.
21. **For victims and survivors who choose to pursue a criminal justice outcome, whether they are a child or an adult, we will support them to remain engaged in the court process and reduce the risk of re-traumatisation**, protecting their rights and bolstering the support they receive through the MoJ's new and revised [Victims' Code](#), consulting on a Victims' Law, and increasing the use of the full range of special measures for vulnerable victims.
22. **Delivering on all three of these objectives will require a dedicated communications approach that focuses on priority audiences.** In line with this Strategy, the Cabinet Office is developing a programme of communication activity to counter child sexual abuse. The programme will build on existing Government campaigns and comprises four strands: preventing offending, protecting children and supporting victims and survivors, partnering with third parties and enhancing the role technology companies play in keeping their users safe. This work will bring together communication disciplines in digital, data, threat leadership insight, behavioural science and national security to better understand the different ways that child sexual abuse happens and guide delivery of communication campaigns to achieve the greatest impact.
23. The diagram below provides a summary of our vision for a whole-system response to all forms of child sexual abuse:

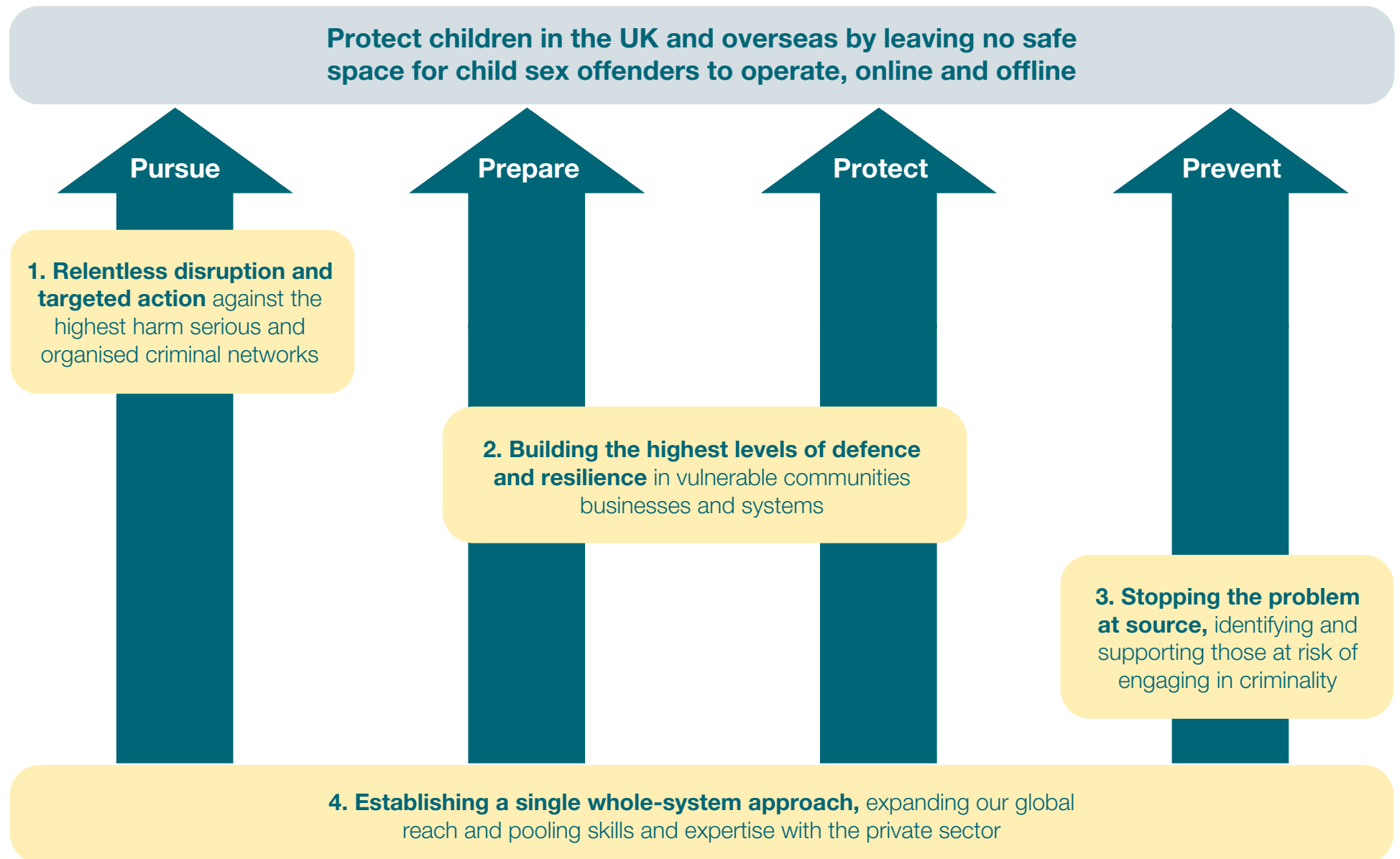
Figure 1

Safeguarding children and young people		Tackling offending and managing offenders	
Safeguarding partnerships drive better multi-agency working, with practitioners able to identify and intervene effectively in child sexual abuse cases		Intelligence is enhanced, ensuring resources are prioritised most effectively	Sex offender management in prison and the community is strengthened
Institutions that work with children prevent offenders from accessing children, and identify and support those at-risk	Law enforcement have an understanding of safeguarding and vulnerability in order to support victims and survivors appropriately	Law enforcement and intelligence services have the capability to disrupt offending at scale, leaving no safe spaces for offenders	
Supporting victims and survivors		Bringing offenders to justice	
Child and adult victims and survivors have access to the support services they need	Child and adult victims and survivors are better supported throughout the criminal justice system	The criminal justice system responds more effectively and efficiently to all forms of sexual offending	
All agencies share information effectively to safeguard children and tackle offending			
Targeted support for those at-risk		Deterring offending	
National and local actors are able to identify and effectively support children, young people and families who are at-risk, including those facing greater risk due to COVID-19	Our evidence base for preventative measures, including for harmful sexual behaviour and peer-on-peer abuse, is more robust	Our understanding of offender pathways and motivations is developed and drives interventions to deter offending in the first place	
Giving children the best start in life, raising awareness amongst parents, carers and families, and protecting children and young people in their communities			
Offenders are less able to take advantage of children and young people through raising awareness amongst parents, carers and families, and giving children and young people access to safe spaces and trusted adults		Children are given the best start in life, including access to information and education around healthy and abusive behaviours	
Working with industry to build resilience to abuse online			
Online services are safe by design and all users know where to report concerns		Online platforms prevent, uncover and stop grooming, livestreaming and sharing of child sexual abuse material	
Working internationally to raise global awareness and standards			
The global profile of child sexual abuse is raised, helping to prevent abuse in key at-risk countries and international sectors, and disrupt cross-border offending both on and off line			

Part 1: Our principles and framework

24. The Government's [Serious and Organised Crime \(SOC\) Strategy](#) (2018) provides the overarching framework for our response to all forms of SOC, including child sexual abuse, and is already driving change and improving our approach.
25. The implementation of the SOC Strategy is driven through the National Strategic Implementation Group on SOC and overseen by the National Security Council, and the Domestic Affairs and the Union Committee. This Strategy will be overseen by the same system, as a subset of the SOC Strategy. The Home Office will provide robust governance to support implementation of this Strategy and hold all partners to account for progress, bringing together relevant Government departments, such as the Department for Education (DfE), the MoJ, the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), and the DCMS, in addition to key delivery partners, including the NCA, the GCHQ and the NPCC, with working groups established on specific issues as necessary.
26. The relationship between this Strategy's objectives and the SOC delivery framework, also known as the '4Ps' – Pursue, Prepare, Protect and Prevent – is illustrated by the diagram below:

Figure 2



27. Our whole-system response to child sexual abuse is underpinned by four core principles which run through the objectives and actions outlined:

Figure 3

Principle 1: Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility, and everyone has a role in preventing child sexual abuse

The central aim of our whole-system response to tackling child sexual abuse is preventing it from happening at all. We must challenge the taboo and silence surrounding child sexual abuse. Everyone has a role to play. We need to ensure all institutions providing services to children are equipped with the right safeguards to intervene as early as possible and build protective factors in families and local communities to impede offenders’ efforts. Effective prevention must involve agencies across the public, private and third sectors as well as academia, and work at local, national and international levels.

Principle 2: We need to work across agencies and systems to uncover and respond to child sexual abuse

The complex nature of child sexual abuse means tackling it is beyond the capacity and capability of any one body. Multi-agency working and information sharing at strategic and operational levels are key to all parts of our response. It will need all Government departments, as well as leaders in different systems, including SOC, safeguarding, health, education, offender management and more, to come together and work towards a common vision.

Principle 3: We need a collaborative response which empowers local partners to respond to local issues

This Strategy outlines a whole-system approach to tackling child sexual abuse, whilst recognising the need to provide local leaders with the flexibility to respond to the local issues they understand best. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of this, and local leaders need to be empowered to adapt to changing circumstances.

Principle 4: Tackling child sexual abuse is a global issue

The UK has ratified the United Nations (UN) [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the [Lanzarote Convention](#), demonstrating our commitment to protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse. We are committed to the UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#), including target 16.2 to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against, and torture of, children. We have a responsibility to tackle UK offenders who abuse children abroad and to engage with international partners to prevent and tackle abuse online. Continuing to provide global leadership on tackling child sexual abuse and driving common international standards is our legal and moral duty, and key to achieving all our strategic aims.

28. The challenges and aims set out in this Strategy will direct our work to improve the response to child sexual abuse in the long-term. We will use them to inform our policy thinking and direct our investment in the next Spending Review. However, we cannot wait to protect our children from abuse. The Strategy therefore describes the concrete steps we will undertake now to drive a step-change in our response. We will update this Strategy to ensure it takes into account emerging evidence and intelligence.
29. This Strategy complements the detail provided in the [Government's paper on group-based child sexual exploitation](#) specifically, which was announced in May 2020 and published in December 2020. This Strategy also builds on previous work to tackle child sexual abuse, such as the [Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Report](#) (2015) and the [Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation Progress Report](#) (2017), recognising the scale of the problem warrants a new, comprehensive approach. It also draws on wider relevant strategies and sector reforms, such as the [Victims Strategy](#) (2018) and the [Strategic Direction on Sexual Assault Abuse Services](#) (2018). We will also ensure that this strategy is complemented by the forthcoming Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, due to be published in 2021.
30. Throughout the Strategy, reference is made to wider reforms happening across Government that will help to strengthen our response to child sexual abuse. It will work in parallel with interventions to reduce risks to children and young people in the community, through programmes tackling child criminal exploitation and the new legal duty to prevent Serious Violence; as well as wider changes to safeguard children from all forms of abuse, through continued improvement to the new multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and the forthcoming Review of Children's Social Care. The Strategy complements interventions to give children the best start in life by investing in early years and improving mental health provision for children through the [Healthy Child Programme](#) and the [Prevention Green Paper](#). This is in addition to systemic improvements to the criminal justice system as a result of the police recruitment programme, investment in prisons and the CPS, as well as extensive reforms to probation.

Geographic Scope of the Strategy

31. The aspects of this Strategy relating to policing and justice apply to both England and Wales. The actions relating to health, social care and education are devolved and apply only to England.
32. In Wales, the partner agencies engaged in the response to tackling child sexual abuse such as social care, health and education, are devolved and are the responsibility of the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government has published its own strategy, the [National Action Plan for Preventing and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse](#) (2019), which sets out actions for the Welsh Government and Safeguarding Boards in Wales on devolved matters in order to prevent child sexual abuse, protect children from child sexual abuse and support child victims and survivors of sexual abuse.

33. In Scotland and Northern Ireland the principal agencies engaged in the response to tackling child sexual abuse, such as policing and the criminal justice system, social care, health and education, are devolved and are the responsibility of the Scottish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.
34. As outlined in the White Paper [The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability](#) (2012), the UK government is committed to working in partnership with the Overseas Territories to tackle threats arising from SOC. Although the Governments of the Overseas Territories are responsible for their responses to SOC and safeguarding, the UK Government will support and collaborate with them where necessary in their efforts to tackle child sexual abuse and exploitation.
35. Whilst this is a UK Government Strategy, the global nature of child sexual abuse requires efforts at an international level to tackle and prevent this crime. We will therefore continue to engage with international partners and organisations to address all forms of child sexual abuse (see [Objective 3.7](#)).

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

36. The Government established the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) (IICSA) in 2015 to consider the extent to which State and non-State institutions have failed in their duty of care to protect children from sexual abuse in England and Wales. The IICSA is also considering how far these failings have since been addressed and what further action may need to be taken to protect children from such abuse in future. The Inquiry has already issued a number of reports which have informed this Strategy. We will continue to carefully consider the Inquiry's findings and recommendations and will incorporate them into our whole-system response and Strategy where appropriate.

Part 2: What do we know about child sexual abuse?

37. This Strategy sets out the Government’s ambition for a whole-system response to all forms of child sexual abuse as defined in [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) (2018):

Child sexual abuse 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.

The term child sexual abuse encompasses child sexual exploitation. References in the Strategy to child sexual exploitation refer to this form of abuse specifically. See the [Glossary](#) for more information on the definitions used.

38. Child sexual abuse takes many forms and can be labelled in different ways depending on where it occurs, how it is perpetrated and by whom. It is important to recognise that different types of offending overlap. Offending should not be viewed in terms of discrete, distinct categories or tackled in a siloed way. For example, child sexual abuse material (CSAM) accessed by online offenders is often the result of ‘contact abuse’, where a child has been abused in person.
39. Having a robust understanding of child sexual abuse is crucial for driving effective prevention, improving our law enforcement response, and ensuring all victims and survivors are safeguarded and supported. To understand the challenges that this Strategy addresses, we first need to outline what we already know about the scale and nature of this abuse. This section will cover:
- I. the scale of child sexual abuse;
 - II. the victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, and the impact of this offending;
 - III. the types and contexts of offending, and how this has evolved; and,
 - IV. the perpetrators of child sexual abuse.
40. We have a better understanding of child sexual abuse than ever before. Since 2016, the Home Office has invested over £7 million in the independent [Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse](#) (the “CSA Centre”) to support evidence-informed practice in

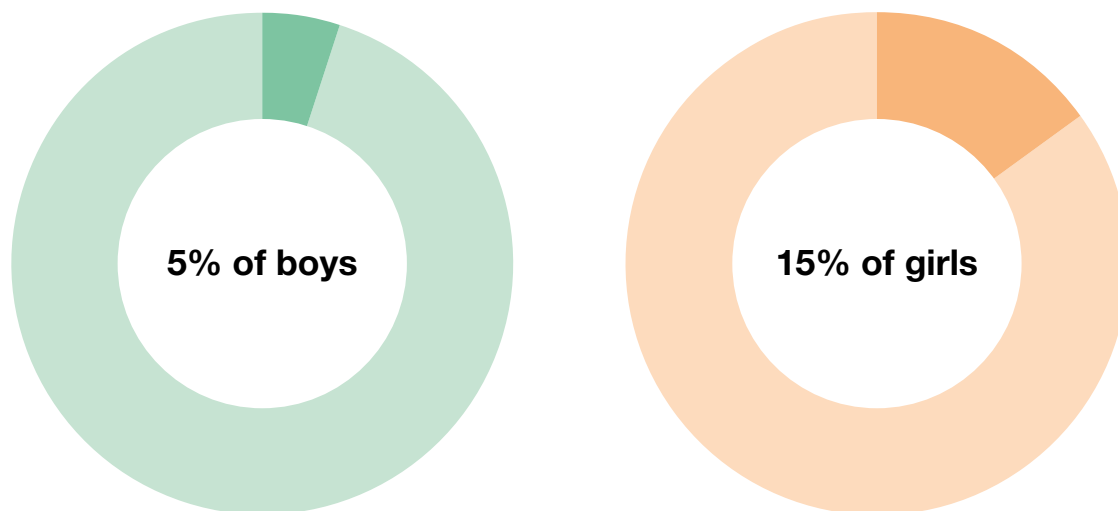
response to child sexual abuse. We have also contributed to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) research, gathered learning from evidence generated by the IICSA, and listened to victims and survivors who have shown great courage in coming forward to share their experiences, for example as part of the [IICSA Truth Project](#).

41. However, we know that there is more to do to ensure that our response is fully evidenced. [Part 2.9](#) outlines the key evidence gaps that we have identified and how we will address them.
42. Child sexual abuse is a complex issue. Recognising and articulating this complexity, and being sensitive and reflexive in the way we respond to it, is essential. This applies to the identification and disruption of child sexual abuse, as well as to supporting the victims and survivors. It is only by embracing and understanding this complexity that policy and practice can make the progress that is needed.

2.1 Scale and prevalence of child sexual abuse

43. 7.5% of adults are estimated to have experienced sexual abuse before they were 16 – approximately 3.5% of men and 11.5% of women – according to the latest prevalence survey by the ONS. This represents an estimated 3.1 million people having experienced child sexual abuse in England and Wales – 700,000 men and 2.4 million women. Looking more widely at a number of different surveys that ask children and adults about their experiences of child sexual abuse, the CSA Centre suggests the prevalence could be higher, estimating that, at a minimum, 15% of girls and 5% of boys experience some form of child sexual abuse.

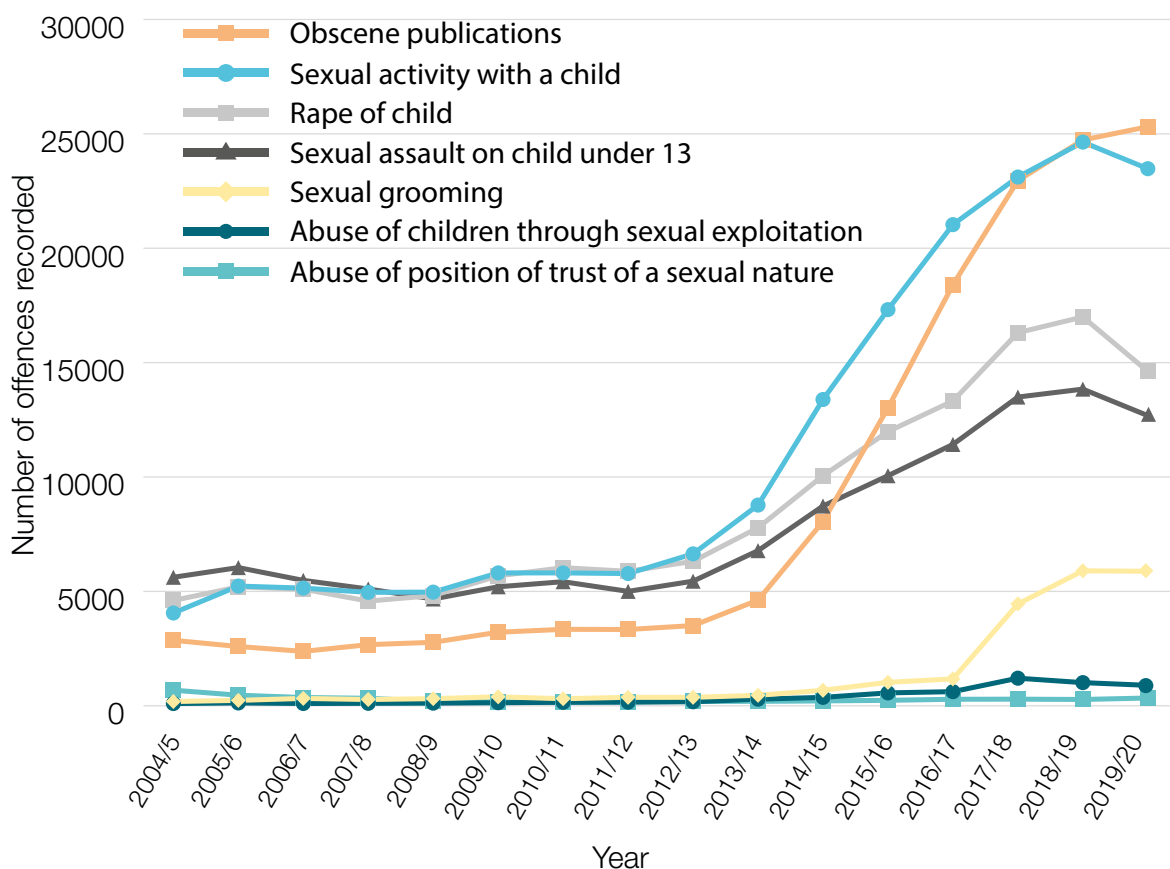
Figure 4



Child sexual abuse prevalence estimate drawn from CSA Centre: Measuring the scale and changing nature of child sexual abuse

44. Over recent years, we have seen steep increases in reporting of child sexual abuse to the police. Over 83,000 child sexual abuse offences (including obscene publications) were recorded by police in the year ending March 2020, an increase of approximately 267% since 2013. Of these, around 58,000 would be considered contact offences, which have increased by 202% in the same period. Due to the way this data is collected, and different sexual offences defined, these figures do not capture certain sexual offences committed against 16 and 17-year-olds, such as rape, as well as sexual assault committed against children over the age of 13. In January 2020, the ONS published exploratory data looking at sexual offences where there is data to identify the victim or survivor was a child, showing that for the year ending March 2019 there were approximately 73,200 offences. This gives a sense of the number of additional sexual offences there may be that are not captured under child-specific sexual offences.
45. However, few of these recorded crimes result in a charge. There were 5,116 charges for child sex offences (excluding indecent images of children) and 3,135 charges for obscene publications offences (a proxy for indecent images of children) in the year ending March 2020. Many recorded obscene publications offences do not result in a charge as they relate to young people sharing images consensually between themselves. In instances like these, it is commonly deemed not in the public interest to charge. Instead, other out-of-court options may be used, with safeguarding measures and advice provided.
46. The total number of prosecutions and convictions for all child sexual abuse offences have fallen from a high in 2016. In the year ending December 2019, around 3,700 defendants were prosecuted for contact child sex offences and of those, around 2,700 were convicted. Conviction rates are higher for indecent images of children offences than contact offences: In the same period, around 2,700 defendants were prosecuted for indecent images of children offences and, of those, nearly 2,500 were convicted.

Figure 5: Police recorded CSA offences in England and Wales, 2004/5 to 2019/20



Home Office 2020: Police Recorded Crime statistics showing trends in activity from year ending March 2003 to March 2019

Note: Operation Yewtree in 2012 led to an increase in victims’ willingness to report and an increase in recorded crime.

Obscene publications is used as a proxy for indecent images of children offences. The majority of obscene publications offences have been recorded against codes that cover indecent images of children offences. These offences will, however, also include lesser offences specifically the sending of explicit images between consenting minors.

Following the implementation of a new IT system in July 2019, Greater Manchester Police have been unable to supply data for the period July 2019 to March 2020. Figures for Greater Manchester are not included in the National and Regional totals for the years ending March 2019 and 2020.

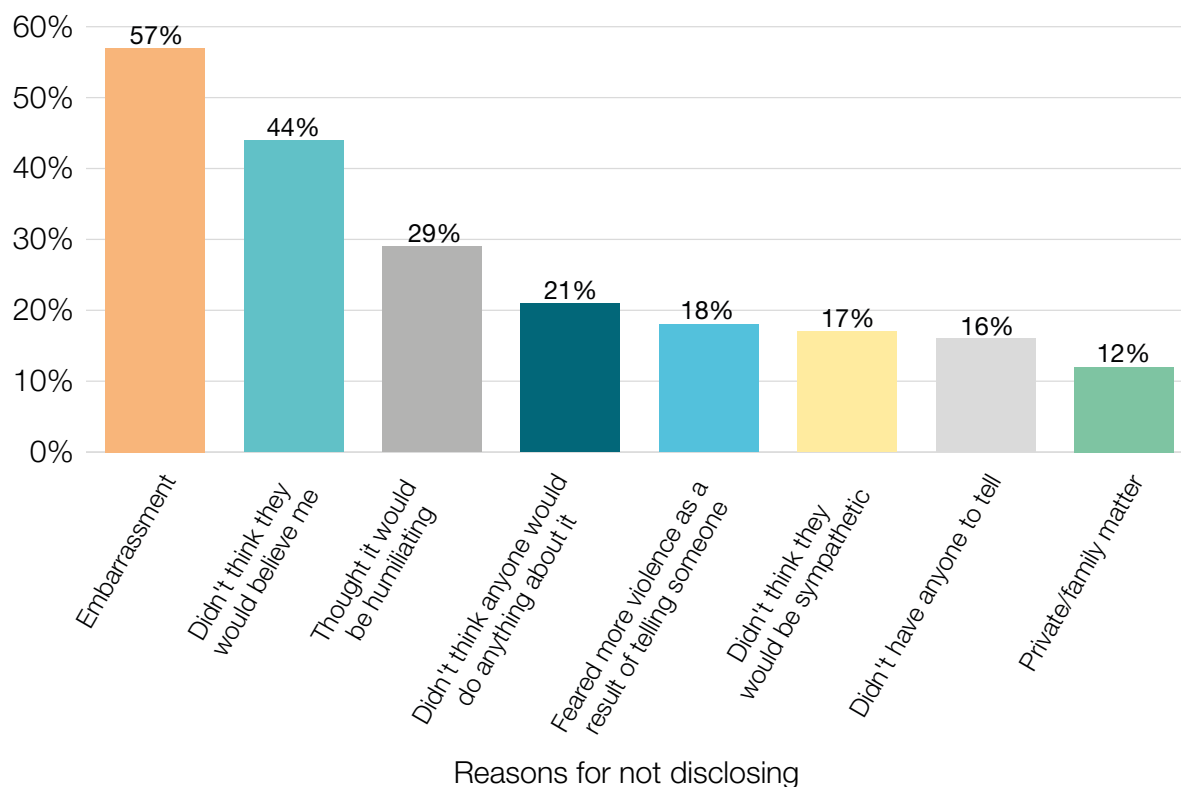
47. In April 2020, the NCA estimated that a minimum of approximately 300,000 individuals in the UK pose a sexual threat to children, either through contact abuse or online. This figure is based on the NCA’s developing understanding, including Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements data (approximately 35,000) and the number of offenders on the dark web (approximately 250,000). Recognising the difficulty of developing definitive estimates in this area, the Home Office and NCA continue to work together to refine and improve our methodologies and understanding. Future estimates will be included in the NCA’s annual National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime.

48. However, it is difficult to truly understand the scale of offending and how many victims and survivors remain unidentified because of under-reporting, under-identification of victims and survivors by agencies, and a lack of robust survey data. The picture is further complicated by the fact that many victims and survivors only disclose the abuse they have suffered many years, or even decades, later. Research by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse indicates that the average time for victims and survivors to disclose abuse is 26 years.
49. The 2018/19 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) found that younger adults were less likely or willing to report having experienced child sexual abuse than older adults. Those aged 18-24 were the age group least likely to say they had experienced child sexual abuse (6%), and those aged 45-54 and 55-64 were the most likely (9% for each group). However, we cannot conclude whether this is due to a reduction in the prevalence of child sexual abuse in recent years, or whether it is due to victims and survivors being more willing or able to disclose abuse the longer it has been since the experience.
50. To improve the quality of data, the ONS are undertaking a [feasibility study](#) to establish how to reach a more robust understanding of the prevalence of child abuse, including child sexual abuse. The results of the first phase of this work were published in January 2021. At the same time, the ONS continue to develop and refine survey tools that support respondents to share their information in a way they are comfortable with.

2.2 The hidden nature of child sexual abuse

51. The majority of child sexual abuse remains hidden and under-identified. As outlined in [Part 2.1](#), we know that in many cases victims and survivors disclose the abuse they have suffered decades later, making it harder to bring perpetrators to justice. The CSEW estimates that 76% of adults who experienced rape or assault by penetration did not tell anyone about their experience at the time. People were even less likely to tell the police - only an estimated 7% of victims and survivors informed the police at the time of the offence and only 18% told the police at any point. Non-recent cases (where the abuse occurred 12 or more months prior to being reported) accounted for 34% of all sexual offences against children recorded by the police in the year ending March 2019.

Figure 6: Reasons for not disclosing abuse during childhood



Office for National Statistics: Crime Survey England and Wales - Why adults who experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16 did not tell anyone at the time, year ending March 2019

52. There are many reasons why children will not or cannot disclose abuse. The CSEW found that the most common reasons given by adults for not telling anyone about the abuse they experienced in childhood were embarrassment and thinking that they would not be believed.

“I always felt guilty that it was my fault and was ashamed... two reasons I never said anything”

Adult victim/survivor

53. We know that certain groups may face barriers to disclosure which affects our understanding of overall prevalence. For example, we know that boys are less likely than girls to disclose abuse during childhood, which may be linked to sexual abuse of boys being under-identified by professionals rather than lower overall prevalence. Similarly, children with disabilities are also less likely to disclose, and yet may be at greater risk of being targeted by perpetrators (see [Part 2.4](#)). Research, [including that commissioned by the IICSA](#), has highlighted that people from ethnic minority groups can face barriers

to disclosing or reporting abuse. Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) victims and survivors are under-represented compared to local demographics, but there is no evidence to suggest this is because the incidence of abuse is lower. Sadly, we know that when children do disclose, they are not always believed.

54. Professionals working with children have a responsibility to raise concerns and identify children who are at-risk of, or experiencing, sexual abuse. However, this can be difficult. In 2015, the Children's Commissioner reported that just one in eight children who are sexually abused are identified by professionals. There is concern that professionals do not have a good enough understanding of the signs of child sexual abuse and lack the confidence and skills to talk about it.
55. The 2020 [Multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in the family environment: Joint Targeted Area Inspections](#) (JTAs - undertaken by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service, and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation) looked at six local authorities to review the effectiveness of frontline safeguarding and how well different agencies work together. It found that there is too much reliance on children to disclose verbally, and that practitioners lack the confidence, knowledge and skills to talk about sexual abuse within the family environment. This results in sexual abuse not being identified as the main risk for the child and therefore not being a sufficient focus of service intervention.
56. Assessments conducted by children's services show an increase in identification of child sexual abuse and exploitation as a risk factor. Assessments with a risk factor of child sexual abuse rose by 28% in the year ending March 2020 from the year ending March 2015 (from 23,800 to 30,460), and those with a risk factor of child sexual exploitation rose by over 50% in the same period (from 12,200 to 18,700). However, the number assessed remains lower than best prevalence estimates.
57. The number of children on child protection plans under the category of sexual abuse is comparatively low, at 1,970 – approximately 4% of all plans – at the end of March 2020. Whilst this has remained relatively stable since 2014/15, it represents a major reduction in proportion over the last 20 years. The Children's Commissioner has highlighted that many victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in the family environment are not placed on a child protection plan for sexual abuse, but instead may be placed on a plan for another type of abuse (such as neglect or emotional abuse). Many children identified as having experienced, or being at-risk of, child sexual abuse will also be placed in the care of a local authority rather than being on a child protection plan.

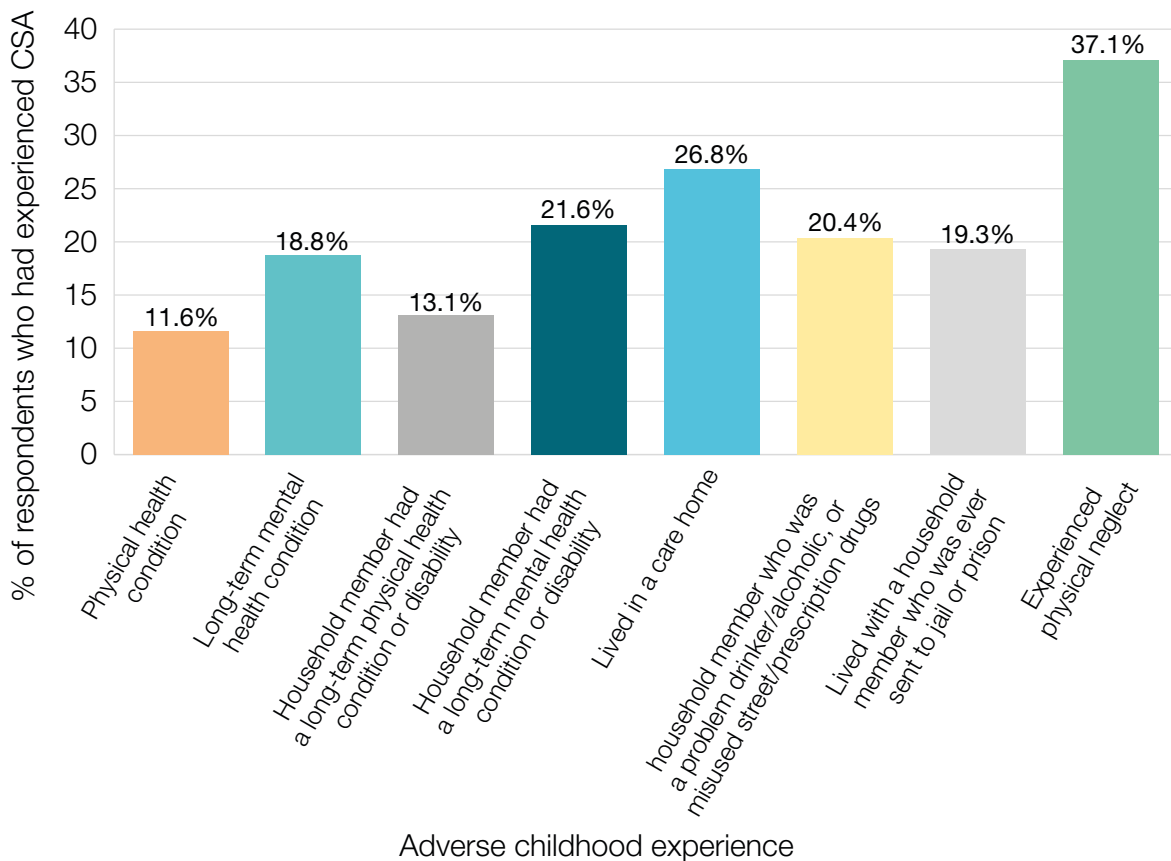
2.3 What do we know about victims and survivors?

58. In recognition that some people who have experienced child sexual abuse will identify as victims and others as survivors, we utilise both terms throughout the document to refer to those who have been sexually abused.
59. It is not the responsibility of a child to stop sexual abuse and it is never a child's fault if they are targeted. Children of all ages, socio-economic backgrounds, sexes and abilities are targeted by offenders who abuse children on and offline, yet because of the challenges set out above concerning identification and reporting, we have a limited picture of 'who' victims and survivors are.
60. There appear to be differences in the ages at which children are most at-risk, depending on the type of abuse. In the family environment, victimisation appears to peak at the age of 9, and victimisation online peaks before age 13. A range of sources suggest that victimisation for child sexual exploitation peaks between 14 and 15 years-old, and that older teenagers are more likely than younger children to receive sexual messages online. However, our understanding of when victimisation peaks may be impacted by a lack of data around the overall prevalence of child sexual abuse. For example, this data is unlikely to accurately capture the scale of sexual abuse experienced by very young children as we know that professionals sometimes rely on children to verbally disclose their abuse (see [Part 2.2](#)).

2.4 Some might be more likely to be abused than others

61. For the avoidance of doubt, it is worth clarifying that abuse does not occur because of a child's vulnerability, but rather because of an offender's inclination and ability to take advantage of this vulnerability. All children are inherently vulnerable by virtue of their age, as well as the power imbalance that exists between children and adults. While it is clear that there are factors that make some children more vulnerable to being targeted than others, there is no factor which makes any group of children uniquely vulnerable. Although awareness of vulnerability can be helpful, it is important to acknowledge that it can also contribute to stereotypes about what a victim and survivor of child sexual abuse looks like, with the consequence that victims and survivors who differ from that picture are overlooked or unwilling to come forward for fear of not being believed.
62. The relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and child sexual abuse is complex and not yet fully understood. ACEs appear to be more prevalent in children who experience sexual abuse. For example, the CSEW found that those who experienced physical neglect were more likely to have experienced sexual abuse, or another form of concurrent abuse such as domestic abuse. These experiences may interact with one another to compound and exacerbate the victim's vulnerability. However, some ACEs may be as a result of previous abuse. One example of this is where children may be in the care of a local authority as a result of experiencing sexual abuse. Offenders may seek to exploit the intersecting vulnerabilities of a child in care, potentially putting them at particular risk of sexual abuse from people outside their home.

Figure 7: The proportion of those who experienced adverse childhood experiences who also experienced child sexual abuse



Office for National Statistics: Crime Survey England and Wales - Whether adults experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16, by adverse childhood experiences, year ending March 2019

63. Children with disabilities or long-term health problems may also be more likely to be targeted. The CSEW shows that adults who reported having a long-term health condition or disability during childhood were twice as likely to have experienced sexual abuse during childhood.
64. The CSEW further suggests that children who live in a household where someone has a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability; or someone who has a drug and/or alcohol problem; or who has ever been to prison, are more likely to have experienced child sexual abuse.
65. Children who are socially isolated, and those who are exploring their sexuality online (particularly LGBTQ+ young people), may also be more likely to be targeted by offenders according to research commissioned by the IICSA.
66. Children in care may also be at higher risk of being targeted by perpetrators of child sexual abuse. Some research indicates that frequent changes to a child's care placement, the absence of consistent trusting relationships, and an overall lack of stability or place to call 'home' may heighten a perpetrator's ability to abuse children in care. The IICSA have highlighted that children in residential settings may be especially

vulnerable to sexual abuse by adults working in such settings, but it is also the case that abusers from outside the home may target children in care.

67. According to [CSA centre research](#), prior experience of abuse and neglect can also heighten the risk of a child or young person engaging in harmful sexual behaviour. This includes behaviour that can increase the risk of victimisation of others or behaviour which has a negative impact on the child themselves. The [2020 JTAI report](#) highlights that, sometimes, professionals do not consider that harmful sexual behaviour may be a result of a child having suffered sexual abuse and so may not always consider their safeguarding needs.

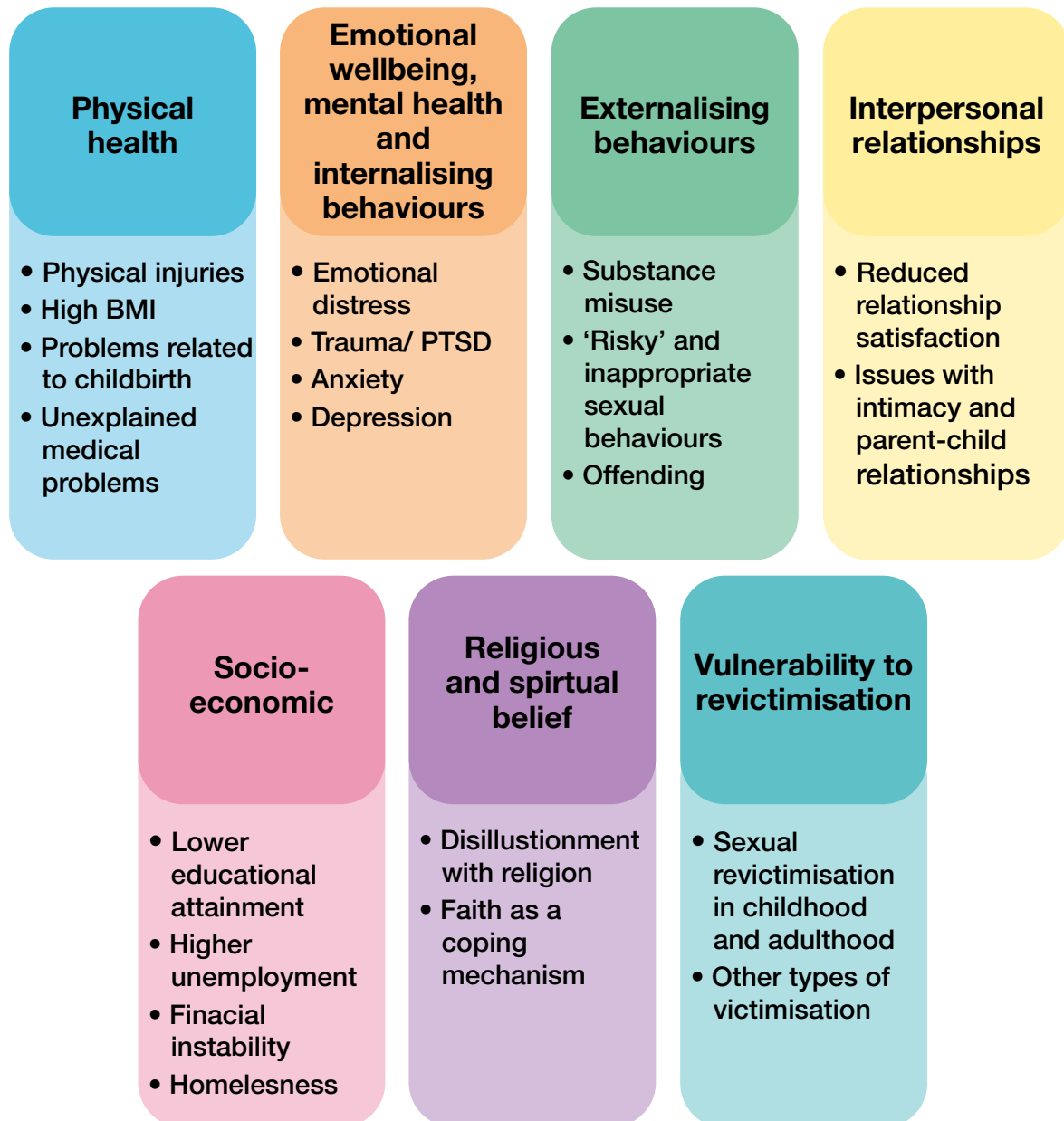
CASE STUDY

During his early childhood, Joseph lived in the care of his mother. Joseph witnessed domestic abuse between his parents and often needed to stay with other relatives because of his mother's mental health issues. Joseph was subsequently placed in the care of his father who began physically and sexually abusing him. After going missing from his father's care, Joseph moved again to live with his maternal aunt, but the living arrangement broke down as his aunt struggled to manage his inappropriate sexualised behaviour. At 14, Joseph went into the care of the local authority. When living in his second placement, Joseph got involved with a gang who seemed to offer a sense of belonging and security, but he went on to suffer violence and exploitation by other gang members.

2.5 What is the impact of child sexual abuse?

68. Whilst the impact of child sexual abuse on victims and survivors can vary significantly, there is strong evidence that child sexual abuse is associated with an increased risk of adverse outcomes in many areas of a person's life. This can include physical, emotional and mental wellbeing, relationships, socioeconomic outcomes, and vulnerability to revictimisation. The impact of child sexual abuse can be significant, regardless of the type of abuse suffered (including where the abuse takes place in an online environment), and can be influenced by a range of factors including the duration of the abuse, an individual's coping mechanism, and the support they receive.
69. Research by the IICSA demonstrates that the impacts of child sexual abuse can last for a lifetime, sometimes resulting in long-term illness and disabilities. These can include a wide range of physical health conditions, as well as mental health issues such as depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Rates of self-harm have been shown to be as high as 49% among adult victims and survivors in treatment, and the risk of victims and survivors of child sexual abuse attempting suicide can be as much as six times higher than the general population.
70. The IICSA's Rapid Evidence Assessment highlights the following key impacts of child sexual abuse:

Figure 8



Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (2018) The impacts of child sexual abuse: A rapid evidence assessment

CASE STUDY

“In my first week at school, the headmaster got me into his study alone. I knew it was wrong and I struggled to get away from him. I was sexually abused on multiple occasions over a number years. I could never tell anyone because by then I had been badged as ‘trouble’ and I didn’t want to let my parents down.

When I was 16, I left boarding school and ran away from home. I ended up drifting between squats addicted to heroin. Every day of my life, I have had intrusive memories of abuse, except when I took a lot of hard drugs.

Individual and group therapy was the hardest thing I have ever done. For years, it seemed like I was getting nowhere. But then one day I realised the nightmares had stopped. There are still many areas of my life that I am not satisfied about, but I have come a long way since that scared and abused little boy 50 years ago.”

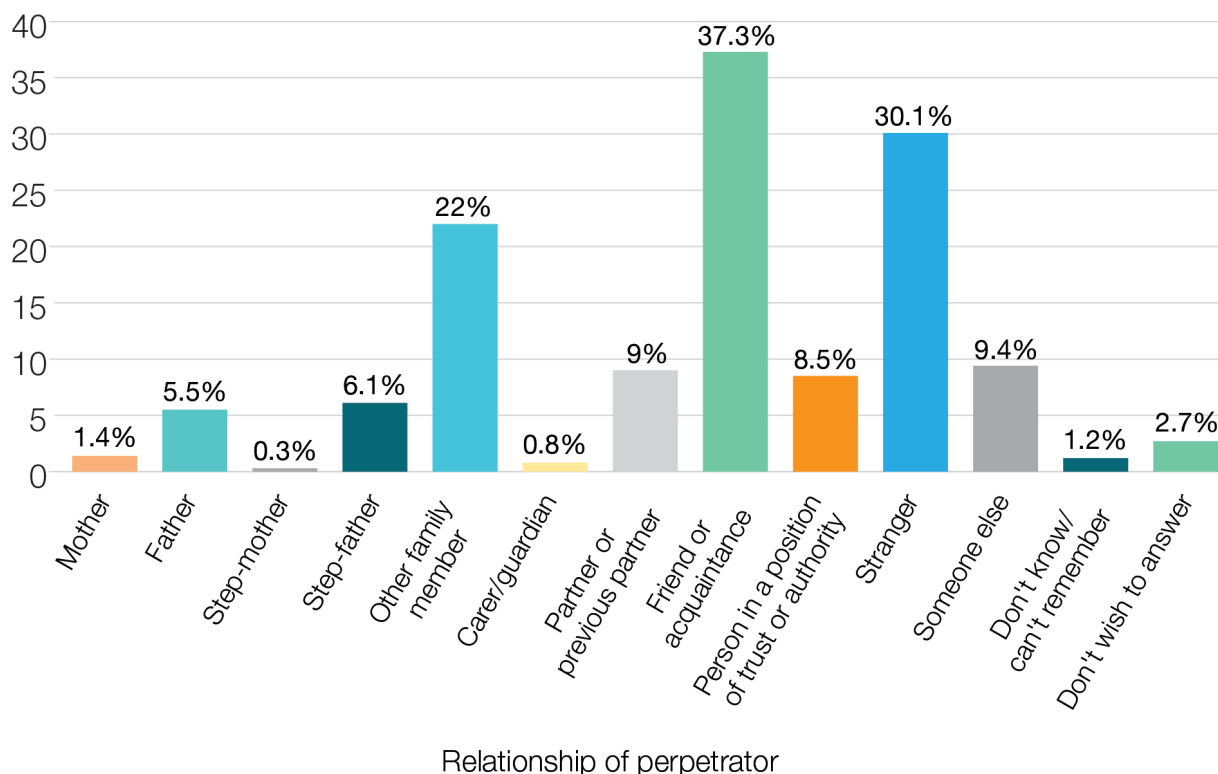
71. Victims and survivors may face barriers to progression in education and to their careers, with research suggesting, on average, victims and survivors have higher rates of unemployment and long-term sickness. They may also use negative coping mechanisms to deal with the impact of abuse. Research points to higher rates of substance misuse amongst victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.
72. Experiencing child sexual abuse can also increase the likelihood of further victimisation. The CSEW has shown that those who experienced child sexual abuse were significantly more likely to experience domestic abuse and further sexual abuse as adults.
73. It is also important to acknowledge that child sexual abuse and subsequent criminal investigations can have a profound impact on the family members of both victims and perpetrators, including social, psychological and financial consequences. There is a need to develop our understanding of the impact of these crimes and investigations on the wider family, and we will work with law enforcement partners and voluntary sector organisations to explore these issues further.
74. Child sexual abuse also has an impact on society and the economy more widely, including pressure on the criminal justice system, healthcare and social services. The Home Office has recently completed work that estimates the financial and non-financial (monetised) cost relating to all victims who continued to experience contact sexual abuse, or who began to experience contact sexual abuse, in England and Wales in the year ending 31 March 2019. This is estimated to be at least £10 billion and includes the costs of this cohort being victimised in previous and future years, in addition to lifetime consequences as a result of experiencing child sexual abuse. (It should be noted that due to the way some costs are incurred over a victim’s lifetime, this cannot be used as an annual or an in-year cost). The estimate includes costs:

- In anticipation of child sexual abuse (expenditure on protective and preventative measures such as costs of education and training);
 - As a consequence of child sexual abuse (physical and emotional harms to victims and survivors, lost economic output, and costs to health and victim services); and,
 - In response to child sexual abuse (costs incurred by the police and criminal justice system, as well as the cost of safeguarding victims).
75. This estimate does not include the costs incurred as a result of indecent images of children or other non-contact offending, and so the true cost of child sexual abuse will be higher than this estimate.

2.6 Understanding child sexual abuse perpetration

76. Victims and survivors may experience different types of abuse across different settings and by different perpetrators. It is crucial to recognise that some offenders will commit both child sexual abuse in person ('contact abuse') and child sexual abuse online. Nevertheless, it is also likely that there are some who will offend online but will never contact offend (see [Part 2.7](#) for more detail on online offending).
77. To further expand our understanding of offending, in March 2020 the CSA Centre published [A new typology of child sexual abuse offending](#) focusing on the contexts and patterns of offending, rather than the characteristics of the perpetrator or the victim or survivor.
78. Child sexual abuse in the family environment constitutes the largest portion of all contact offending. Although the majority of this abuse remains hidden, the Office of the Children's Commissioner estimates that, excluding indecent image offences, approximately two-thirds of child sexual abuse reported to the police is perpetrated by a family member or someone close to the child. The CSEW provides further evidence for this, with most offences perpetrated by friends, acquaintances or family members.
79. Child sexual abuse is also perpetrated in institutions, including by those in positions of trust within those institutions. The IICSA has highlighted the extent of non-recent institutional abuse where teaching or educational staff, clergy or church-related staff, medical practitioners, residential care workers and others, have used their power to systematically abuse children. Although much of this is undetected, ONS research shows that 16% of men and 6% of women who had experienced sexual abuse as children had been abused by a person in a position of trust outside of the family environment.

Figure 9: Relationship of perpetrator to victim/survivor



Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 as respondents could choose more than one answer to the question.

Office for National Statistics: Crime Survey England and Wales – Relationship of perpetrator to adults who experienced any sexual abuse before the age of 16, year ending March 2019

CASE STUDY

In 2014, Operation Sanctuary was launched: a police-led multiagency investigation responding to an increased awareness of the prevalence of sexual exploitation in the Newcastle area. This resulted in the arrests of over 30 men and the identification of numerous victims, including children and adults with learning disabilities. The survivors' accounts, and subsequent inquiries, confirmed that sexual exploitation was happening in Newcastle on a much larger scale than previously recognised. In October 2015, the Newcastle Safeguarding Children Board and Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board decided to carry out a joint thematic Serious Case Review to look beyond the specific incidents or individuals, and understand patterns or themes in the sexual exploitation cases likely to apply in other circumstances.

The learning from this Review and from Operation Sanctuary is now embedded into Newcastle's services, particularly in the form of the Multiagency Sexual Exploitation Hub. Awareness has been raised about the nature and impact of sexual exploitation, which has had a positive impact on identification and prevention, as well as support for victims and survivors.

80. A particular type of child sexual abuse is group-based child sexual exploitation. A number of large police operations in recent years have uncovered the scale of this type of offending in the UK. In Rotherham alone, at least 1,400 children were sexually exploited between 1997 and 2013. These offenders tend to be in loosely connected networks formed through pre-existing social connections, such as work or family. Offender groups do not have a single defining structure. It is difficult to draw conclusions around the representation of different ethnic groups in the offending population as data on ethnicity is not consistently collected by the police and other agencies. The limited data that exist suggests that whilst offenders operating within the same group tend to be ethnically homogenous, offending is not unique to any particular ethnic group. The dynamics and peer reinforcement present in such groups can enable and encourage offending behaviour towards a large number of victims. The motivations for such abuse are hard to pinpoint, but likely extend beyond a sexual interest in children to wider motivations relating to misogyny, a desire for power and control, and in some cases financial gain. A separate paper on [Group based child sexual exploitation: characteristics of offending](#) was published in December 2020 (see [Objective 1.3](#) for further detail).
81. Whilst this form of abuse can often be perpetrated by small and loosely associated groups of individuals, there are also some more organised criminal groups which traffic children into the UK to sexually exploit them. 638 victims of this cross-border manifestation of child sexual abuse were identified in 2018, according to statistics from the National Referral Mechanism, an increase of 16% on the previous year.
82. Crucially, we know that forms of exploitation often overlap. For example, some gangs both sexually and criminally exploit their victims, or force victims to abuse one another as a means of control.
83. A proportion of abuse is perpetrated by children and young people themselves, with some prevalence studies suggesting that a third to two thirds of child sexual abuse is perpetrated by under 18s, and the Children's Commissioner estimating that 25% of intra-familial abuse is perpetrated by under 18s. Children, particularly in younger age groups, may engage in developmentally inappropriate sexual behaviour, which can be harmful towards themselves and/or others. Harmful sexual behaviour exists on a spectrum from inappropriate through to problematic, abusive and violent. It is important to recognise that harmful sexual behaviour may be an indicator of prior abuse, neglect or trauma, with one study finding that two thirds of young people who display this behaviour were known to have had such experiences. Ensuring the safeguarding and welfare needs of children who display harmful sexual behaviour are met is paramount. In some cases, responses may also involve criminal justice pathways.

2.7 The evolving nature of child sexual abuse offending

84. We know that child sexual abuse is evolving and that perpetrators are increasingly utilising technology and the internet to offend. Online exploitation and grooming can be perpetrated both by strangers and those known to the victim, with the intention of coercing children into sexual conversations or activity online, or into meeting in person to perpetrate abuse.

CASE STUDY

Aged 13, Jenny used her computer to download music and chat to friends. A friend introduced Jenny to someone claiming to be a teenage girl online. This person was friendly to Jenny, asking her questions about her life and things she was interested in. Eventually, the person asked Jenny to send a photo of herself, which Jenny did.

“I felt safe because “she” was telling me things about her as well and she had sent me a photo of herself. I thought I had been careful because I hadn’t given out my home address, but I had already given away much more than I thought, for example my local area by saying which school I went to.”

“I was boosted by her compliments, so when she sent another photo, so did I. She said that she had sent my photos to her boss and he liked them. He wanted to come and meet me to take some professional photos. That’s when I was frightened of what I had already done, and I didn’t know how to take it back or what to do next.”

When Jenny was threatened with her photos being shared, she agreed to give her address. Jenny waited at home on her own. *“I remember him pushing his way into the flat and into my bedroom and then he indecently assaulted me.”*

85. Through both open and dark-web sites and forums, offenders communicate and organise. They create and distribute CSAM, live-stream abuse, share victims’ or survivors’ information, and swap strategies to commit offences. Anonymisation technology becoming more accessible is also enabling more offenders to avoid detection.
86. There is evidence that online offending has increased since 2018, enabled by a growth in social media and new internet technologies. Intelligence from law enforcement suggests it is possible that this may result in further contact offending, for example with online behaviour acting as a precursor to a contact offence (in the case of online grooming), or driving contact offending (such as with livestreaming). Offenders are exploiting opportunities online, including social media, to reach out to multiple children and, in some cases, blackmailing victims and survivors into engaging in further and

more extreme acts by threatening to circulate images of their abuse. We know that some offenders who abuse children in their family environment or local community share images or videos of the abuse online. Research by the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) shows that 67% of online CSAM imagery detected appears to have been taken in a home setting. Intelligence also suggests that there is a rising monetisation of CSAM and live-streaming of abuse.

87. Child sexual abuse is an international issue, with CSAM websites hosted in countries around the world. The IICSA has heard that live-streaming of child sexual abuse is an increasing threat. This type of abuse is made more complex by the way it can straddle multiple jurisdictions, with offenders and victims located in different countries.
88. The 2019 [Global Threat Assessment](#) by the WeProtect Global Alliance shows that the majority of commercial live-streamed abuse perpetrated in person targets children in the Philippines, and in nations of the Global South more broadly, where there are higher levels of poverty and children with vulnerabilities that offenders may seek to exploit. Some offenders travel to abuse children in areas that have limited capacity and/or capability to prevent child sexual abuse and pursue offenders.
89. However, live-streaming is also a threat to children in the UK. Offenders will often coerce or force children within a home setting into live-streaming. The IWF found that the vast majority of live-streamed abuse the organisation has identified has involved the child alone in a home setting.
90. In the context of children leading more of their lives online, combined with changing attitudes to dating and relationships, the sharing of nudes and semi-nudes (also known as “youth-produced sexual images”) are also increasingly normalised and there is an issue around the growing volume of, and a falling age-range in, nudes and semi-nudes produced by young people and children.
91. Some young people generate images in a consensual way with age-appropriate peers. However, consensually produced nude or semi-nude images or videos can be shared more widely without consent, adding to the volume of material available for offenders. In the first six months of 2020, 44% of all child sexual abuse content dealt with by the IWF was assessed as containing self-generated images or videos, compared to 29% in 2019. Other nudes or semi-nudes are created in a coercive and abusive context, and offenders can use self-generated imagery to blackmail and further abuse victims and survivors.

2.8 Characteristics, motivations and life experiences of perpetrators of child sexual abuse

92. Our understanding of offenders is limited to those we have identified, who likely form a small proportion of all offenders. We do know that offenders come from all walks of life, all age groups, all ethnicities and all faiths. Generally, it is difficult to identify characteristics of sex offenders that would distinguish them from the general population.

93. Conceptualisations of motivations to offend often centre on an offender having a sexual interest in children. This is important to consider, as those offenders who report a sexual interest in children tend to re-offend at higher rates. However, it is likely that a wider range of factors may contribute towards an individual's offending behaviour, including other sexual motivations (such as sexual gratification, a sexual interest in illegal sexual activity, problematic attitudes towards sex, and the use of sex as a coping mechanism) and non-sexual motivations (such as financial motivations, misogyny, or those relating to entitlement, power, and control).
94. An offender's circumstances and life experiences will also play a role in the onset and maintenance of their offending behaviour – for example, consumption of alcohol, peer influences, issues in self-management, or relationship breakdown may be risk factors. Collectively or separately, all of these may put someone on a path to offending. It is important to note that having a sexual interest in children does not guarantee an individual will become an offender.
95. We know that the vast majority of people who experience abuse and neglect in childhood do not go on to abuse as adults. At the same time, early abuse, trauma, rejection and attachment difficulties are considered to play a role in offending, with some research suggesting that child sex offenders are more likely to have experienced abuse and adverse experiences in childhood compared to non-sexual offenders, and non-offenders.
96. Although we suspect that some combination of these factors come together to become relevant to an individual's offending behaviour, much more research is required to understand how they contribute.
97. Based on research in England and Wales, child sex offenders typically tend to be male and white (in line with general population demographics). Different data sources suggest different ages of offenders. A study by the NSPCC found a large proportion of offending was committed by adolescents, whilst the MoJ conviction data suggests many offenders are aged in their early 30s to mid-40s. However, this may reflect when offenders come to the attention of the authorities, rather than the true age of child sexual abuse offenders.

2.9 Driving an evidence based, victim-centred response

98. Although we have better insight into child sexual abuse than ever before, it is imperative that we keep up with the evolving threat. Further research is needed to better understand how to prevent and tackle all forms of child sexual abuse, as well as to provide effective support for victims and survivors. We want to ensure that all aspects of our response are fully informed by the latest data and research, whether from policy, inspectorates, academia or the third sector. We also recognise the importance of ongoing engagement with young people, and victims and survivors themselves, and will be engaging with young people as the Strategy is implemented.

99. The CSA Centre and IICSA have carried out a useful exercise with stakeholders [mapping evidence gaps and identifying those of most importance](#). We will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to drive forward research to inform our work and fill the gaps identified.
100. As part of this, the Home Office has carried out work to estimate the costs of contact child sexual abuse (see [Part 2.5](#)). We will continue to develop our understanding of the cost of wider forms of child sexual abuse and explore new approaches to develop our understanding of its prevalence. The Home Office will also invest in developing and embedding best practice for the provision of support to victims and survivors; as well as building our understanding about who is committing these offences and why; what offender pathways look like; and what works in terms of preventing and disrupting offending.

2.10 How has COVID-19 impacted on child sexual abuse?

Whilst we cannot yet know the true impact of COVID-19, and the harm inflicted by offenders during lockdown, it is recognised that necessary measures to stop the spread of the virus may have increased the risk of certain forms of child sexual abuse. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, reports to police for all types of sexual offences have decreased and referrals to children's social care have been below average when compared to the same periods over the past three years. However, we know that child sexual abuse often remains hidden for a long time.

There is evidence from third sector partners to suggest that child sexual abuse may have increased during the pandemic. The NSPCC saw a threefold increase in Childline counselling sessions about child sexual abuse within the family between March and May 2020, from an average of eight sessions per week before the restrictions were imposed to an average of 23 per week. Over a quarter of Childline counselling sessions about sexual abuse within the family related to abuse that has happened recently. Between April and August 2020, NSPCC also saw an 11% increase in Childline counselling sessions about online sexual abuse, as well as a 60% increase in contacts from adults concerned about children experiencing online sexual abuse.

Offenders and potential offenders are likely to have spent more time online, with limited or no access to usual employment, recreation or social networks that may prevent harmful or abusive behaviour. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation have seen an increase in use of their preventative resources for child sexual abuse, which support those with concerns about their own or another's behaviour. Between Spring (5 Mar – 27 May) and Autumn (10 Sep – 2 Dec) 2020, the average number of weekly users of their offender-focused website - *Stop It Now! Get Help* - increased by 128%.

The risk to children of online sexual abuse, alongside other forms of online harm, is likely to have increased as a result of isolation measures, with children being educated and spending more time online. There was a sustained increase in public reports to the NCA's Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) command between April and August

2020, with 29% more reports received compared with the same period in 2019. The level of reports from children graded high-risk was also elevated between early April and August 2020, at around 64% compared with around 35% in 2019. In 2020, the Internet Watch Foundation also processed 16% more reports containing child sexual abuse material compared to 2019, equating to millions of images and videos. Of these reports, there was an increase of 77% in images and videos containing self-generated child sexual abuse content compared to 2019's total. This may indicate an increase in children being groomed or forced to perform sexual acts and/or an increase in "sexting", which can constitute harmful sexual behaviour and make children and young people vulnerable to blackmail and abuse.

Home is not the safe space it should be for all children and lockdown measures may have increased the risk around forms of intra-familial abuse. However, children may also have had some protection from intra-familial abuse because of the presence of non-abusing parents, carers or family members in the home.

At the height of lockdown restrictions, the risks around contact child sexual exploitation outside of the home may be decreased due to children, young people and perpetrators being forced to stay at home. As restrictions are eased, risks around contact exploitation in the community may rise as children and young people spend more time in public spaces again.

We have worked closely with law enforcement, the UK intelligence community, safeguarding partners and the third sector to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the threat of child sexual abuse and ensure they have the resources they need to tackle offending, protect children, and support victims and survivors. This Strategy details some of the ways in which we have bolstered our response as a result of COVID-19, alongside our long-term vision for ensuring the whole system is equipped to tackle the threat.

Part 3: Our ambition for the future

Objective 1: Tackling all forms of child sexual abuse and bringing offenders to justice

101. We must go further in our actions to protect children from sexual abuse and be relentless in our pursuit of offenders - ensuring perpetrators are identified, stopped and brought to justice. Children may suffer abuse at the hands of a family member or person in a position of trust; be targeted by strangers in their local community; exploited by groups or gangs; or abused by peers, who may themselves be victims. Increasingly, children are being targeted online by perpetrators who can reach them anywhere through digital devices, even in seemingly safe home environments. Law enforcement and other key partners tell us that offenders groom and blackmail children to engage in sexual acts online, or to meet so that they can abuse them in person. Some of these offenders are becoming more organised and making use of sophisticated technology to swap child sexual abuse imagery and tips to evade detection.
102. We continue to make vital progress in our efforts to tackle offenders, bolstering the capability of our law enforcement agencies to keep pace with the evolving nature of the threat. In the year ending March 2020, arrests relating to online child sexual abuse increased by 50% compared to the previous year, reaching 7,212 arrests, and 8,329 children were safeguarded. Over 1.3 million unique indecent images of children (including over 45,000 videos) were added to the Child Abuse Image Database (CAID) in the six months up to early January 2021, enabling faster and more effective identification of victims, survivors and offenders. Our progress is demonstrated by the increase in the number of victims and survivors identified in indecent images of children in 2019/20 compared to the previous year – up 43% to 793 victims and survivors, the highest number to be identified in a single year.
103. We will nevertheless go further to equip our law enforcement agencies with the tools, resources and powers necessary to uncover and tackle more child sexual abuse, continue to promote a child-centred and trauma-informed policing approach, and make sure prosecutors have the capacity and capability to bring more offenders to justice.

Measures for improvement

- There will be an increasing number of disruptions leading to a reduction in the overall threat of child sexual abuse, as evidenced by assessed intelligence reporting
- Prioritisation of offenders will become more robust, enabling law enforcement to target those assessed as highest harm
- We will process digital forensics of child sexual abuse material faster, as well as identify more victims and offenders, and reduce access to child sexual abuse material
- There will be an increase in the number of effective trials for child sexual abuse
- We will maximise the effectiveness of Sexual Harm Prevention Orders, Sexual Risk Orders and Child Abduction Warning Notices

1.1 Building capacity in the criminal justice system

104. Transforming our approach to pursuing offenders will require additional resources, prioritised to have the greatest impact across all types of child sexual abuse and agile enough to respond to change. In recent years, we have made significant investment to expand the capacity of national and regional law enforcement to tackle and disrupt offending at scale, and will continue to do so.
105. **In 2019, we announced an unprecedented drive to increase police officer numbers by 20,000 over three years to ensure that policing have the workforce they need to tackle all crime types, including child sexual abuse.** We provided £750 million in 2020 to support forces to recruit up to 6,000 additional officers onto our streets by the end of 2020/21, the first stage in this uplift. Ministers are backing the use of a share of the Police Uplift Programme in years two and three to support policing's response to serious organised crime (SOC), and we are working with the sector to determine how these officers can be deployed to achieve maximum impact against the most serious forms of criminality, including child sexual abuse. **We are also continuing to provide funding to several child sexual abuse-related investigations and operations through the Police Special Grant, amounting to just over £16.25 million in 2019/20.**
106. Inspection reports stress that rising numbers of public protection cases, including child sexual abuse cases, are placing pressure on the health, wellbeing and capacity of staff. We will work to provide high-quality support for officers and staff through the National Police Wellbeing Service and the Police Covenant, recognising the role this plays in enabling a sensitive, victim-led law enforcement response, and ensuring expertise is not lost through secondary trauma or burnout.

We will disrupt the highest harm offenders online and safeguard more children through investment in undercover online officers and the NCA's dark web capabilities

107. Undercover online officers (UCOLs), working within Regional Organised Crime Units (ROCU) and the NCA, are a key capability for law enforcement comprising specially-trained teams and infrastructure to target and disrupt the highest-harm offenders. To ensure UCOL capabilities are maintained and strengthened, we provided another £9.81 million investment in 2020.
108. **In 2020 we invested £20.76 million to build the workforce capacity and technical capability of the NCA.** £9.86 million was used to improve the NCA's ability to tackle perpetrators seeking to offend against children via the dark web. We will also enhance the NCA referrals bureau with an investment of £2.35 million, making processing of industry referrals for online abuse faster and enabling NCA-led activity to safeguard more children.

CASE STUDY

In 2019, after an NCA investigation, an offender was convicted of child sex offences and was sentenced to 15 years in prison and an indefinite Sexual Harm Prevention Order. He had been viewing indecent images of children for two years and, during this time, joined discussions with like-minded individuals on online forums, sharing tips to commit offences and evade detection.

To join an online private paedophile discussion group, which had a condition that new members post new abuse images, he went from viewing child sexual abuse material to producing and sharing it online, uploading footage of himself raping a six-month-old baby girl and sexually assaulting a two-year-old boy.

1.2 Maximising resources, strengthening intelligence and driving collaboration

109. Child sexual abuse is often highly complex, involving sophisticated technology and organised networks and crossing local force and national boundaries. Our response therefore requires co-ordination at international, national and regional levels.
110. We need to use the full force of the State to counter the growing scale and impact of child sexual abuse. To effectively combat this threat requires new data, intelligence and assessment capabilities that build our understanding of offending behaviours, alongside prioritising and maximising the use of our existing national security capabilities.

111. Employing our world-leading analytical and intelligence tools, we will continue to use the unique capabilities of GCHQ, working alongside the NCA and policing, to take a system-wide approach to tackling child sexual abuse and offending.
112. **We will enhance our intelligence capability, building on existing assets to develop a thorough and up-to-date understanding of the threat that utilises data, insight and analysis from across organisations working to combat child sexual abuse.** One component of this will be further investment in the National Assessments Centre, housed within the NCA, which uses its unique positioning to provide up-to-date threat assessments. Alongside this, GCHQ will provide expert, cross-sector threat insights, informing operational delivery and keeping policy-making ahead of the threat. These activities will inform and enable the entire counter-child sexual abuse community.
113. **The Government will drive co-ordinated activity that maximises our whole-system response to child sexual abuse, agreeing clear roles and responsibilities for operational partners who together are positioned to deliver a rapid, proactive and comprehensive response.** The Home Office will set and own strategic policy, with the NCA leading the national law enforcement operational response. The NPCC will drive effective local responses and GCHQ will lead on identifying and developing solutions to systemic internet problems. This will build on the [Public Accounts Committee's 2019 recommendations](#), with the Home Office ensuring collaboration and providing the tools for partners to deliver unique value and the best outcomes for victims and survivors.

We will fuse capabilities across agencies by investing in the Joint Operations Team, combining NCA and GCHQ intelligence and analytical skillsets

114. We will capitalise on opportunities to fuse capabilities across agencies by continuing to invest in the Joint Operations Team, which combines GCHQ and NCA intelligence and analytical skillsets with national law enforcement capability to target the most technologically sophisticated offenders online. **The National Cyber Force will work in support of the Joint Operations Team, using its capabilities and technical knowledge to help detect, disrupt and prevent child sexual abuse online.**
115. Drawing on lessons from across national security, we will work with delivery partners to improve our ability to acquire, analyse and share data so that intelligence be effectively generated and disseminated between Government, intelligence agencies, NGOs and policing. Moreover, we will develop and align the cloud computing systems for these sectors in order to share data, information and insight that helps combat child sexual abuse.
116. It is clear that the quality and extent of data that is collected on offender and victim characteristics, including, but not limited to, age, gender and ethnicity, is inadequate. There is also a need to improve the quality and extent of data collected in relation to

the modus operandi of offending. This was highlighted by the Home Office's recent publication of the [paper on group-based child sexual exploitation](#), which was unable to draw robust conclusions around some characteristics and came as a disappointment to some, including victims and survivors. More robust data collection on characteristics, as well as further analysis of this data, is therefore needed to better understand offenders and victims because community, cultural, and other factors are clearly relevant to understanding and tackling offending. **The Home Office will engage with criminal justice partners, academics, think tanks, charities and frontline professionals on improving the range of data currently collected, the quality of data collected, and drawing out insights from the data to help protect children by preventing and detecting offending.**

117. **The Home Office is also investing to strengthen place-based responses to group-based child sexual exploitation by improving the collection and integrity of police data at regional and national levels.** This includes investment in analysts in each of the policing regions who will continue to develop a quarterly data collection on the totality of the child sexual abuse cases undertaken by police forces, as well as refreshing the Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Operations Database which will capture details of victims and offender numbers, characteristics, and modus operandi.
118. **In addition, the Home Office will provide funding in 2021/22 to scope delivery of a Tackling Organised Exploitation project,** through which the police - working in collaboration with the NCA's National Data Exploitation Capability and the National Assessments Centre - will improve intelligence, analytics and tasking to respond more comprehensively to the organised exploitation of vulnerable people.
119. We also need to address the increasingly global nature of child sexual abuse, including through our international preventative work, the setting of shared global standards and an action plan to tackle transnational child sex offenders, as outlined in [Objective 3.7](#).

1.3 Enhancing the tools and powers available to law enforcement

120. As a Government, we need to ensure that law enforcement officers who work relentlessly to tackle child sexual abuse have the understanding and legal powers necessary to tackle offending and safeguard children.
121. **We have equipped law enforcement with legal powers to tackle all forms of child sexual abuse, including Sexual Harm Prevention Orders (SHPOs), Sexual Risk Orders (SROs) and Child Abduction Warning Notices, and will go further by considering what additional or updated powers and civil orders would enhance law enforcement's response** (see [Objective 2.3](#)). In addition, we are making reforms to the pre-charge bail system, including encouraging greater use of pre-charge bail where necessary and proportionate, to ensure that bail is being used effectively to protect witnesses and victims and survivors, to support the police in the timely management of investigations, and to encourage increased engagement with victims and survivors to allow them to play a greater role in the process.

122. Recognising the need to reform the law governing search warrants, particularly with regards to accessing electronic evidence such as that relating to child sexual abuse material online, the Home Office invited the Law Commission to conduct its recent [Search Warrants](#) review. We welcome the report and will consider its recommendations carefully to ensure police have the powers necessary to effectively gather evidence to prosecute offenders.

Tackling group-based child sexual exploitation in the community

Over the last decade, there has been growing awareness of cases of child sexual exploitation perpetrated by groups of offenders within local communities. High-profile investigations in places like Rotherham, Oxfordshire, Huddersfield and Newcastle have highlighted complex situations where child sexual offending has proliferated through networks (sometimes referred to as ‘grooming gangs’) over years or even decades. The Home Office has been pursuing work on a number of fronts to understand the scale and nature of group-based child sexual exploitation to promote and support more effective prevention, disruption, law enforcement and safeguarding work by local agencies. To date, this has included: a review of published evidence on this type of offending, the conducting of interviews with police officers who have investigated group-based offending, and exploratory data analysis.

On 15 December 2020 we published a [paper](#) summarising the insights from this work, following a period of engagement with an external reference group made up of subject matter experts. The paper makes clear that there is a lack of robust data and evidence in this space, which makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions. Findings indicate that offenders involved in group-based child sexual exploitation are predominantly but not exclusively male, and often under the age of 30, though in some cases much older. The networks offenders operate in tend to be loosely connected and based on pre-existing social connections, such as family and work. On the specific question of how different ethnic groups are represented in the offender population, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions, as this data is not consistently collected by the police and other agencies. This type of offending is not restricted to any one ethnic group. Most research has found that group-based child sexual exploitation offenders are most commonly white, whilst some research has suggested an over-representation of Black and Asian offenders relative to national population demographics. It is important to stress that all research in this area is subject to the same limitations in poor quality data. Motivations between offenders differ and may include financial gain, sexual gratification or a sexual interest in children. Misogynistic views as well as a group dynamic where victims are disregarded and offenders think they can act with impunity may contribute to creating a permissive environment for this abuse. Frequent elements of this offending include initiating contact with children and young people in a shared local area, grooming them (as well as significant adults, such as parents) into believing the child is in a legitimate relationship with the offender, and using parties, drugs and alcohol to take advantage of them. The abuse itself often takes place in private or commercial locations, but has also been seen to take place in public spaces.

This Strategy has been informed by our growing understanding of group-based child sexual exploitation, and the policies outlined throughout - to strengthen safeguarding, support victims and survivors, and be tougher in our law enforcement response - will directly help us to address it. These actions will complement specific measures to target group-based offending, producing stronger local and regional responses that inform and benefit from an enhanced national policy response. These measures include:

- Enhancing the Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit to provide strategic guidance to local agencies in profiling, preventing and disrupting this form of offending ([Objective 3.4](#));
- Continuing to support local agencies to combat exploitation through the Children's Society's Prevention Programme ([Objective 3.3](#));
- Building on the Prevention Programme by working with other sectors, particularly businesses, to create safer local spaces ([Objective 3.3](#)), as well as supporting focused engagement with communities to deter potential offenders and support bystanders in spotting the signs of exploitation and how to report concerns ([Objective 2.1](#));
- Engaging with criminal justice partners, academics, think tanks, charities and frontline professionals on improving the range, quality and analysis of data collected on offender and victim characteristics to help protect children by preventing and detecting offending ([Objective 1.2](#));
- Investing in regional analysts to continue to develop a quarterly data collection on the totality of the child sexual abuse cases undertaken by police forces, as well as refreshing the Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Operations Database ([Objective 1.2](#));
- Working with the police to develop innovative approaches to tackling organised exploitation through improved analysis and sharing of data, with a £760,000 investment in a scoping phase in 2020/21 ([Objective 1.2](#)); and,
- Continuing to fund a number of major investigations into group-based child sexual exploitation through the Police Special Grant ([Objective 1.1](#))

123. **The Home Office is working to improve law enforcement's understanding and response to vulnerability, as well as enhance safeguarding practice.** We are funding the NPCC-led Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme, which implements the [National Vulnerability Action Plan](#), draws law enforcement learning from serious case reviews and other reports, and collates and disseminates practice examples. We are also funding the College of Policing to deliver evaluations and feasibility studies on selected practice examples to improve our evidence of interventions that work to tackle violence and vulnerability. The Home Office will continue building child safeguarding capability by funding the College of Policing to roll out their Public Protection and Safeguarding Leaders Programme to eight further cohorts of senior officers throughout the course of 2020/21.

1.4 Employing world leading technology to tackle child sexual abuse material online

124. The scale of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online is vast. It can be accessed on common search engines within three clicks and is being viewed by large numbers of individuals in the UK and globally, re-traumatising victims and survivors. 3.45 million global registered accounts have been uncovered by the NCA across the ten worst child sexual abuse dark web sites, with around 5-7% of these hosted in the UK. During a one-month period in the course of the first 2020 lockdown, the Internet Watch Foundation estimate there were 8.8 million attempts by UK internet users to access child sexual abuse imagery. The scale and patterns of online abuse raises questions around the potential for normalisation of this kind of behaviour among offenders, including through discussions with like-minded individuals on internet forums, and the potential for escalation into contact sexual abuse of children.

We will invest in the UK's world-leading Child Abuse Image Database (CAID), which in early January 2021 contained over 16.8 million indecent images of children (including over 323,700 videos), to help law enforcement to identify more offenders and safeguard more victims and survivors

125. **Starting with an initial investment of £7 million in 2020/21, the Government's five-year CAID Transformation programme will help law enforcement to manage the scale of CSAM by further enhancing the CAID system, enriching data and allowing greater sharing of data and capabilities.** We will use funding to develop CAID's 'backbone' system, as well as to introduce and incorporate new capabilities, such as automating the classification of videos and images to speed up investigations and reduce the need for visual categorisation by officers. In addition, we have recently rolled out a facial matching capability to enable identification of individuals in images and videos. These actions will help to safeguard more victims and survivors, bring more offenders to justice and better support officers' wellbeing. In the future, a Fast Forensics Triage capability will be rolled out to all UK forces to greatly accelerate the scanning of devices to identify CSAM.

CASE STUDY

In March 2019, an offender was sentenced to 22 years imprisonment and made subject to a Sexual Harm Prevention Order for raping a five-year-old boy and sexually abusing a three-year-old girl. Images of the abuse were identified through an operation in which the NCA, working with partners in South Korea and the United States, supported the takedown of a dark website containing 145,000 videos of child sexual abuse.

The man's face was not visible in the videos, but NCA investigators were able to use the Child Abuse Image Database's specialist identification capabilities to piece clues together to identify him and both the victims.

126. Improvements to CAID's processes and infrastructure will enable CAID hashes (the unique 'fingerprint' of an image or video of child sexual abuse) to be shared nationally and internationally. This will be used to drive increased cooperation between the private and third sectors to identify images, prevent their spread online, and remove them from websites.
127. **To help law enforcement prioritise their activity, we will continue to invest in a suite of risk assessment tools for all forces in England and Wales and the NCA,** including designing and building a robust, flexible and evidence-based system for prioritising anonymous online child sexual abuse suspects based on risk and likely geographical location.
128. **We will also equip law enforcement with the capability to gather, store and assess large volumes of digital evidence at pace,** recognising the significant bottleneck caused by processing digital forensics in bringing child sexual abuse offenders to justice and that online child sexual abuse cases take up 60% of all law enforcement digital forensics capacity. We will support the [NPCC Digital Forensic Science Strategy](#) to deliver greater efficiency and effectiveness, speed up investigations and improve safeguarding.

1.5 Bringing offenders to justice

129. We need to charge, prosecute and appropriately sentence child sexual abuse offenders wherever possible to provide victims and survivors with the justice they deserve and to stop offenders from committing further abuse. Whilst we have made progress in bringing offenders to justice, the overall number of prosecutions for contact child sexual abuse offences has fallen by 29% since 2017.
130. **To increase the number of effective trials for child sexual abuse, we will drive a cross-criminal justice system response,** using supporting governance structures to facilitate collaboration between Government departments and delivery partners, and hold the system to account.

131. More widely, we are investing to build capacity across the criminal justice system. Alongside investments in law enforcement, the Government will use the additional £85 million granted to the CPS to respond to shifting operational trends, including the rapid growth in digital evidence and any increase in caseloads as a result of the increased number of police. We will also deliver 10,000 additional prison places, utilising up to £2.5 billion to create safe and secure prisons that support both offender rehabilitation and the modernisation of the prison estate.
132. **Recognising the importance of swift case progression for victims' and survivors' wellbeing, the Government will work with the CPS, NCA and the police to better understand case progression for child sexual abuse cases in the criminal justice system and opportunities for improvement.** We will also develop more granular data on child sexual abuse cases through engagement with the cross-Criminal Justice System Rape Data Task and Finish Group. This has been set up to significantly enhance how the criminal justice system collects, shares and draws insight from currently available adult rape data, and support better understanding and monitoring of rape and serious sexual offences throughout the criminal justice system. We will explore opportunities to apply learning from this work to child sexual abuse cases.
133. **The Government's end-to-end review into the criminal justice response to rape, which will report in early 2021, is investigating the decline in referrals, charges, prosecutions and convictions we have seen for rape cases in recent years.** Although the review focuses on adult rape cases, its findings will help us to understand how to drive a better response to all forms of sexual assault and abuse, including child sexual abuse. We will work with law enforcement and the CPS to apply any relevant learning to child sexual abuse.
134. As part of the review, the [2019 Rape Inspection – A thematic review of rape cases by Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate's \(HMCPSI\)](#) highlighted the need to strengthen communication and joint working between law enforcement and prosecution. We are committed to increasing the effectiveness of early engagement between the police and prosecution to build the strongest possible cases for court. The CPS has accepted all the recommendations in the HMCPSI rape inspection report and, together with the police, a joint Rape and Serious Sexual Offences action plan will be launched in 2021. This will address issues raised in the report and, in due course, any relevant findings from the cross-Government review. We will also look to the review to help us to understand any potential gaps in police training on sexual offending and work with the College of Policing to address any recommendations.
135. **To ensure prosecutors have the understanding necessary, the CPS will continue to update training and guidance for prosecutors who handle child sexual abuse cases,** including through new training on the impact of trauma on memory, and reviewing and updating the guidance for prosecutors on rape myths to reflect the changing nature of sexual behaviours in the digital age.

We will legislate to ensure that the legal framework is fit for purpose in meeting the challenge of child sexual abuse in the 21st century

136. Any work to improve the capacity and capability of the criminal justice system must be complemented with efforts to ensure that the legal framework and sentencing keeps up with the evolving nature of this heinous crime. In 2019 guidance on online grooming, offending involving indecent images of children, and offending identified through undercover online operatives was updated. The majority of child sexual abuse offences are also included in the [Unduly Lenient Sentence scheme](#), allowing victims and survivors to challenge decisions that do not abide by current standards or guidance and are technically lenient.
137. **To build on this work, we will legislate to give the courts sufficient powers to sentence child sexual abuse offenders in a way that reflects the severity of their crimes and matches the level of risk they pose to the public.** We are already strengthening the preparatory legislation that is used most often following undercover online officers' deployments to ensure that those who attempt to commit child sexual abuse on children under 13 receive sentencing befitting the increased vulnerability of intended victims.
138. **We have also published [A Smarter Approach to Sentencing](#), a White Paper setting out our plans for a sentencing and release framework that better protects the public, including proposals to ensure that serious violent and sexual offenders are kept in prison for longer.** For example, we will abolish automatic halfway release for an additional cohort of sexual and violent offenders, and those serving a discretionary life sentence will also spend longer in prison before being considered for release. Moving forward, it is vital that the courts are fully equipped to deal with changes in technology, such as the use of social media platforms, in this sensitive and important area. We will continue to work with the MoJ to keep the criminal law on sexual offences under review.

Objective 2: Preventing offending and re-offending

139. Our central aim is to prevent child sexual abuse from occurring in the first place. The number of child sexual abuse offenders managed by probation and the police is growing on an annual basis. Inspection reports also highlight the need to improve the management of registered sex offenders (RSOs) and the risk they pose to children. Prevention is crucial in safeguarding children, as well as reducing the burden on law enforcement and other agencies working tirelessly to pursue offenders. We will therefore drive work to stop offending before it happens, and ensure that those who have offended are subject to quality risk assessments and risk management plans to mitigate the threat they pose.

Measures for improvement

- Inspection reports will highlight improvements in prison, probation and police offender management and safeguarding practice.
- Law enforcement will become more adept at detecting offending and reoffending, including breaches of notification requirements and civil orders.
- We will have a more advanced understanding of what increases and decreases the risk of child sexual abuse offending.
- More people, including potential offenders, those close to them and professionals, will seek advice and information on avoidance and deterrence.
- The tools and processes available to law enforcement to effectively manage offenders will become more robust and well-evidenced.

2.1 Deterring potential offenders

140. Deterring individuals from perpetrating child sexual abuse is vital to preventing child sexual abuse from happening, ensuring the safety of children and reducing demands on law enforcement.

We will invest in information and advice to deter child sexual abuse offending and improve our understanding of it

141. **Firstly, we must make sure that potential offenders know that they will be caught and face serious consequences if they engage in any form of child sexual abuse, whether it is contact or online sexual abuse.** Potential offenders must understand that we are using the full force of the law, including our intelligence capabilities outlined in [Objective 1](#), to find and prosecute those who sexually abuse children.

142. Some potential offenders can be deterred from perpetrating abuse with the right intervention at the right time. In recent years, we have expanded the evidence base on what works in terms of desistance to encourage people to abstain from offending, and invested in initiatives to intervene with individuals who seem to be at risk of offending. The Lucy Faithfull Foundation aims to prevent child sexual abuse by offering advice and support to people who suspect abuse and to those who are concerned about their own thoughts or behaviour. In 2019 alone in the UK, the organisation's website and helpline were contacted 94,342 times by people seeking help.
143. **We will support national and local initiatives to divert people away from offending, including by continuing to invest in the Lucy Faithfull Foundation's *Stop It Now!* campaign and services and its confidential helpline.** We will support the organisation to expand the signposting and reach of its services, focusing on at-risk groups, high-risk online environments, and impactful settings in the local community.

CASE STUDY

A 27-year-old male called the Stop It Now! helpline concerned about his sexual thoughts towards his 8-year-old niece. He had not accessed any indecent images of children online, but reported he was viewing increasingly extreme adult pornography.

He was encouraged to think about the consequences of his behaviour and what would happen if he acted on his inappropriate thoughts. Over a series of calls, he was supported to cut all unsupervised access with children, make positive changes to his lifestyle, and talk to family members about his thoughts. He continues to use the helpline for ongoing support and advice, to update helpline staff on his progress and share any concerns he has.

144. Research conducted with the Lucy Faithfull Foundation suggests that individuals concerned about their sexual urges would most likely seek advice about this from health practitioners. **We will work to ensure that healthcare professionals are informed about child sexual abuse and have the confidence and ability to direct those seeking help to the right sources of support to help prevent them from abusive behaviour, whilst also recognising their responsibility to safeguard children.**
145. A clear picture of offending can help to drive more informed approaches to deter and prevent offending in the first place, as well as a more effective law enforcement response. Improving our understanding of offenders and offending behaviour is therefore crucial. **We will work closely with key stakeholders in drawing together research and operational insights to develop the evidence base on child sexual abuse offending and maximise the potential of activity to prevent it.**

146. The Home Office will bring together the existing evidence and intelligence on child sex offenders, alongside a general understanding of how people with a previous pattern of offending come to abstain from offending, to ensure these insights feed into our policy-making. We will also expand our research on offenders, including the use of behavioural science and consultation with our international partners.
147. **Building on our [paper and findings relating to the characteristics of group-based child sexual exploitation in the community](#), we will work with local safeguarding partners and community-based organisations to develop and promote strategic approaches to community engagement**, to help to identify, target and prevent offending in communities and encourage bystanders to report concerns.

2.2 Improving offender management in prisons and probation

148. Incarcerating offenders is an important way to provide justice to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse as well as to protect the wider public. **As of 1 April 2020, the most serious sexual and violent offenders who are given a standard determinate sentence of seven years or more have been required to serve two-thirds of their sentence in custody, rather than being released halfway through their sentences.** As outlined in [Objective 1.5](#), we have also gone further through the [A Smarter Approach to Sentencing White Paper](#).
149. We have further legislated to ensure that, when making decisions about release, the Parole Board consider any failure by an offender to disclose the whereabouts of their victim's remains or the identity of children who are the subject of indecent images.
150. Preventing re-offending by child sex offenders requires a strong and effective probation service. We have set out the Government's [extensive plans to reform the probation system](#) and tackle re-offending, support victims of crime and keep the public safe. This will include bringing all probation services under the management of the National Probation Service and strengthening processes for monitoring offenders in the probation system by managing the risks they pose, keeping victims and survivors informed, enforcing licence conditions, and investing in skilled probation staff.

We will reform probation and work to improve the management of all sex offenders, including child sexual abuse offenders

151. We take our responsibility to protect the public from those convicted of sexual offences extremely seriously and have taken steps to respond to the gaps in our response identified in a thematic inspection report from 2019, which looked at the management of men convicted of sexual offences, including child sexual abuse offences.

152. **In 2019, Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) published an [action plan](#) explaining how we will strengthen and improve our management of those convicted of sexual offences.** This includes reviewing and strengthening risk assessment processes; improving the way those in custody are supported throughout their sentence; ensuring rehabilitative interventions are targeted at the right people at the right time; and providing robust training for probation staff working with those convicted of sexual offences. Whilst COVID-19 and subsequent restrictions have impacted on this plan, we have adapted our approach to ensure its delivery, such as by providing ‘virtual’ staff training.
153. **The MoJ is committed to engaging in impact evaluations of HMPPS-accredited programmes,** whilst recognising that re-offending outcomes often take years to determine and can only be measured once a programme is fully implemented. It is our ambition that all accredited programmes will have a long-term impact evaluation to measure proven re-offending outcomes, recognising dependency on large enough sample sizes, availability of comparable controls, and suitable follow-up periods to detect statistically significant change between treatment and comparison groups.

2.3 Improving offender management in the community

154. The UK has some of the toughest powers in the world to deal with those convicted of sexual offences, and we are committed to ensuring that the system is as robust as it can be. All individuals convicted or cautioned for a relevant sexual offence automatically become subject to notification requirements (commonly referred to as the ‘sex offenders register’) and are managed in the community by the police. Many sex offenders have to register for long periods of time therefore the number of RSOs is increasing each year, and it is crucial that law enforcement agencies at all levels are equipped with the tools and skills needed to monitor offenders and identify and manage re-offending.
155. **As such, the Home Secretary will ensure that the police management of RSOs in the community under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) works effectively,** building on previous inspectorate reports which have considered management in prisons and probations to make sure that the police have the powers, capabilities, governance and funding required to manage these individuals in the community as effectively as possible.
156. Evolving technology is making it easier for those convicted of child sexual abuse offences to hide their activity and re-offend online. The technological capabilities of law enforcement need to be maximised to ensure that they have all the equipment required to monitor sex offenders’ internet use. **We will invest to extend a pilot providing law enforcement with improved technology to monitor the online activity of RSOs being managed in the community.**

We will ensure that police management of registered sex offenders in the community under Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements works effectively and invest in technology to identify re-offending online

CASE STUDY

Cumbria Police use the Cumbria Police Digital Forensics Unit to assist in the management of registered sex offenders. On an unannounced home visit to a registered sex offender, police offender managers asked to see any digital devices the individual possessed. He produced a mobile phone and a laptop, indicating that he had no other devices. Data Forensic Unit officers assisted the police offender manager to locate a further digital device. The registered sex offender was subsequently arrested, remanded in custody, recalled on licence and was sentenced for the breach of his Sexual Harm Prevention Order.

157. Law enforcement agencies also need to be equipped with the right powers to manage offenders effectively. The police and NCA can apply to the courts to place certain restrictions on the activity of RSOs and those who pose a risk of sexual harm via civil orders. For example, Sexual Harm Prevention Orders (SHPOs), Sexual Risk Orders (SROs) can restrict internet use, interaction with children, access to certain professions and more. We will continue to promote best practice in relation to these orders.
158. **We will look to strengthen these civil orders in a number of ways**, as well as monitor their use on an ongoing basis through close collaboration with operational partners and MAPPA Annual Reports:
- **We will enable courts to impose positive obligations upon RSOs and those who pose a risk of sexual harm requiring them to engage in certain action.** For example, where proportionate and necessary, law enforcement agencies could apply to the courts for an SHPO or SRO to compel an individual to undertake a behaviour-change programme, alcohol or drug treatment, or submit to polygraph testing as part of risk management while under police management in the community.
 - **We will broaden the power of application for SHPOs and SROs beyond the police and NCA**, allowing the British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police to also apply for them.
 - **We will provide in legislation for the civil standard of proof required for civil order applications**, as well as clarifying this within official guidance.

- **We will introduce express provision within legislation for electronic monitoring of individuals subject to SROs and SHPOs**, clarifying that, where deemed appropriate and necessary by the courts, they may provide law enforcement agencies with an additional means of monitoring compliance with the order's conditions.

CASE STUDY

When the NCA searched the laptop of a 70-year-old British male, they found conversations discussing the live streaming of child sexual abuse on demand, as well plans to travel abroad to commit abuse in person.

The NCA was subsequently able to prove that the offender made 49 payments totalling £15,009 between January 2015 and July 2017 to an individual in the Philippines. Information was passed to the Philippine authorities, which led to the arrest of a Filipino female and the safeguarding of six children aged between three and 13.

In May 2019, the offender was sentenced to three years and six months in prison, put on the sex offenders register indefinitely and issued with a Sexual Harm Prevention Order with travel restrictions.

159. **We will simplify the process for registering individuals convicted of relevant sexual offences overseas as sex offenders upon entering England and Wales**, helping law enforcement to manage these individuals as effectively as possible.
160. Beyond managing offenders in a prison or probation context, **we will review and expand the evidence base for managing RSOs who have completed their sentence in the community to reduce the risk they may pose to the public and the burden on law enforcement**. This will include exploring best practice that enables the commissioning of corrective programmes and health services to manage the risk offenders pose and deter offending behaviour.

2.4 Improving multi-agency working and information sharing to manage offenders effectively

161. Ensuring agencies work together and share information in a timely way is key to the effective risk management of child sexual abuse offenders. We are already driving multi-agency working through MAPPA that helps to monitor offenders and share information about them within the criminal justice system and with safeguarding partners.
162. **We will improve the MAPPA process by supporting consistency in the thresholds applied by local strategic management boards**, and will support strategic management boards to improve the training available for those working within the arrangements. We will also strengthen and streamline processes for information-sharing under MAPPA by creating a clear and lawful basis for disclosure.
163. **We will improve the MAPPA shared database (also known as ViSOR) used to manage offenders**, including through exploring alternative digital offender management systems, building on the success of the existing system in bringing agencies together to share information, as well as strengthening risk assessment, management and mitigation.
164. Effective offender management also requires prisons and probation to work together and share information with safeguarding partners to recognise when an offender may place a child at risk. **We will therefore set out clear expectations for staff in prisons and probation by producing a new policy framework on child safeguarding and updating the prison public protection manual.**

Objective 3: Protecting and safeguarding children and young people, and supporting all victims and survivors

165. A key component of protecting children and young people from child sexual abuse is ensuring that the communities and institutions where they spend their time, both online and offline, are safe. Our efforts to give children the best start in life, strengthen and educate families, and provide targeted support for those at-risk will be crucial to stopping offenders from taking advantage of children and young people, and must work alongside systemic changes to improve multi-agency working and cross-border collaboration. We will also continue to raise awareness, deploying Government communications in different forums, to help prevent child sexual abuse and protect children and young people.
166. Despite knowing more than ever about child sexual abuse, a large portion remains hidden. Victims and survivors tell us they most commonly experience abuse in their own or someone else's home, but this is under-identified and shrouded in taboo. We want reporting of child sexual abuse to continue rising to bring this heinous crime out of the shadows.
167. Where abuse does take place, it needs to be identified early and children safeguarded from further harm. It is also fundamental that child and adult victims and survivors have access to high quality, timely support through universal and specialised services that meet their varied needs.

Measures for improvement

- Our understanding of prevalence of all forms of child sexual abuse improves, and prevalence will decrease over time.
- Victims and survivors of child sexual abuse will increasingly feel able to disclose abuse as reflected in rising reporting rates.
- More children and young people experiencing child sexual abuse are identified, as demonstrated through a rising number of children referred to, assessed by and receiving support from children's social care due to all forms of child sexual abuse risk.
- Inspection reports and thematic reviews of police, health and children's social care will highlight improvements in safeguarding, multi-agency working and a strengthened response to child sexual abuse.
- Industry partners will adopt the interim code of practice and will be compliant with the new regulator, leading to better quality referrals to law enforcement in the short-term and a reduction in the prevalence of online abuse in the long-term.
- An increasing number of countries will sign up to the WeProtect Global Alliance and the Model National Response, and we will have a clear assessment of key countries at-risk.

3.1 Giving children the best start in life, and raising awareness amongst parents, carers and families

168. It is not the responsibility of a child to stop sexual abuse and it is never a child's fault if they are targeted. We know that offenders take advantage of the inherent vulnerability of children and young people, exploiting their age and the power imbalance between children and adults in order to abuse them. We also know that offenders gravitate towards individuals who are perceived to be vulnerable, in situations where safeguards around them may be lower. Early experiences of abuse are associated with the risk of harmful sexual behaviour, which can be damaging to children displaying this behaviour as well as those around them.
169. **A key part of protecting children from child sexual abuse is therefore giving them the best start in life.** There are ongoing efforts across Government to ensure this, from the [Healthy Child Programme](#), to the [Prevention Green Paper](#), to transforming mental health provision for children and young people. Recognising the critical importance of children's early years, the Government is undertaking a review to improve outcomes for children in their first 1,001 days including looking at the impacts of vulnerability and adverse childhood experiences.
170. **We are also going further in the services we provide to children, including creating more opportunities for young people to develop trusting relationships with a key adult through investing in the Youth Investment Fund.** Up to £220 million is being invested in our holiday activities and food programme, providing enriching activities and a healthy meal for disadvantaged children in the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays in 2021. This support the Government's commitment to establish a flexible childcare fund to increase the availability of high quality and affordable flexible childcare. The Government is also committed to championing the family hub model – as set out in its [2019 Manifesto](#). In December 2020 procurement began for a [National Centre for Family Hubs and Integrated Family Services](#) to work with councils to develop and spread best practice, as well as a [Family Hubs Evaluation Innovation Fund](#) to build the evidence base on integrated family service models.
171. **This Strategy complements broader initiatives to address domestic abuse and tackle all forms of violence that particularly affect women and girls.** The Government will pass the landmark Domestic Abuse Bill, representing our commitment to transform the response to this abhorrent crime. The Home Office will also develop a separate Domestic Abuse Strategy, building on existing work to drive down domestic abuse-related crimes, better support victims and survivors, and reduce costs that fall to the individual, communities and public services. The Domestic Abuse Strategy will sit alongside a new Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, seeking to reduce the incidence and severity of violence against women and girls, including through prevention and identification, and to improve the response to increasingly prevalent forms, such as online.

172. **Through the introduction of compulsory Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE), we will empower teachers to deliver high-quality, age-appropriate teaching about all types of abuse**, including child sexual abuse. RSHE's focus on healthy relationships in both primary and secondary education will enable teachers to provide children with information covering concepts of, and laws relating to: sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment and domestic abuse, and how these can affect current and future relationships – messages that will help to challenge victim-blaming around abuse. As a result, the pathways for children to receive help and support will be more effective. Teachers will be better informed and education settings better equipped to identify child sexual abuse, as well as risks associated with harmful sexual behaviour, sharing of nude and semi-nude images, and peer-on-peer abuse.
173. Teachers and staff should also be equipped to support children in the online world to enjoy all its benefits, as well as to respond to online harm and to safeguard children. **The Government will help the general public critically engage with online content, including children and young people, through an online Media Literacy Strategy.**

“At school everything was about straight relationships but that was no good to me, I knew I was gay. I used the internet to try and find out. I met this guy who told me he would help me get in touch with other guys and he did, but they hurt me really bad.”

Male, age 16

174. Recognising the central role education plays in protecting children and the disruption to schools and colleges caused by COVID-19, the Government is committed to prioritising the safe return of all children to classrooms and to ensuring that children, families and school staff have the support they need. The DfE is working with key partners and voluntary sector organisations to deliver the Wellbeing for Education Return initiative, an £8 million project training local experts to provide additional advice and resources to schools and colleges to support the wellbeing, resilience and recovery of students in light of the ongoing impact of the pandemic. The information and support provided are as relevant to remote provision as they are to face-to-face teaching. Alongside this, the DfE has funded a pilot with Education Support to provide professional supervision from experts and peer support for school leaders.

Schools will be empowered to educate children about healthy relationships, and we will raise awareness of child sexual abuse amongst parents, carers and families

175. **As Government, we will build the evidence on what works in reducing the risk of children and young people sharing nudes and semi-nudes**, and we will continue to support further development of a [Report-Remove tool](#) that gives young people the power to remove nude and semi-nude images of themselves online. **In 2020, the UK Council for Internet Safety and DCMS published [advice for education settings working with children and young people on how to respond to an incident of nudes and semi-nudes being shared](#)**, replacing the [Sexting in schools and colleges: responding to incidents and safeguarding young people](#), published in 2016. We will also continue to develop online learning resources that help children, their parents and professionals to identify online risks and access safeguarding support when needed by building on the NCA's Education Programme, [Thinkuknow](#).

CASE STUDY

Thinkuknow is the national online safety education programme, delivered by child protection and education specialists at the NCA. Between April 2017 and March 2019, Thinkuknow resources were downloaded over 81,000 times. In 2018/19, over 31,000 professionals were trained by the NCA's [Thinkuknow CEOP ambassadors](#). 2019 also saw the launch of Jessie & Friends, the first Thinkuknow learning resource designed for children as young as four.

176. Although a large proportion of offending occurs in the family environment, non-abusing parents and carers are key to protecting children inside and outside of the home. The importance of this has been stressed by children spending more time at home and online as a result of COVID-19. In response, the Government has driven efforts to share information with parents and carers through publishing advice on GOV.UK on [keeping children safe online](#) and from [wider forms of abuse and harm](#). The NCA has increased messaging to parents and carers through their [#OnlineSafetyAtHome](#) campaign and resources, which has been downloaded over 500,000 times. **As Government, we will continue exploring opportunities to disseminate consistent and up-to-date tools and information to parents and carers from all communities about all forms child sexual abuse, including around risks within the home.**
177. **The Home Office will also review Sarah's Law (the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme)** - under which anyone can ask the police if someone with access to a child has a record for child sexual offences - to ensure it is being used consistently by police, and consider whether we can extend its scope and raise awareness of its function.

3.2 Strengthening the role of industry

178. A key aim of this Government is to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online and COVID-19 has further emphasised the need to ensure the internet is a safe space for children to explore. We expect the tech industry to play its part. Industry partners need to be at the forefront of preventing online services and platforms from being used to facilitate child sexual abuse, including the viewing and sharing of child sexual abuse material, online grooming and the live-streaming of child sexual abuse. Significant progress has been made by companies to protect children online, but there is much more to be done.
179. **The UK, with our Five Country partners (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States) have developed a set of [Voluntary Principles](#) that provide a framework for companies to combat online child sexual abuse and drive collective action.** Together, the Five Country Partners have also pivoted to respond to COVID-19, effectively engaging industry around the need to communicate with their users about heightened online risk. As a result, Microsoft, Google, Facebook, SNAP, Roblox and Twitter, among others, developed an information campaign aimed at parents, carers and children on staying safe online. Industry will assess the impact of this work and we will continue to collaborate with them to see what more can be done to ensure safe use of their platforms.
180. **We will develop legislation to improve internet safety for all through the forthcoming Online Safety Bill, to be introduced in 2021.** The [Online Harms White Paper](#), published in April 2019, and Government's subsequent [full response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation](#), published in December 2020, provide detailed proposals for the introduction of a statutory duty of care to ensure that companies have appropriate systems and processes in place to improve the safety of their users, especially children, and confirms that Ofcom will be named in legislation as the independent regulator. Alongside the consultation response, **the Home Office published the [voluntary interim codes of practice on online child sexual exploitation and abuse](#), setting out our expectations for what companies should do to identify, address and prevent child sexual abuse on their services.**
181. We recognise that tackling online harms, including child sexual abuse, is a global problem, and that legislation in the UK, and elsewhere, forms only part of the response required. The UK, with its strengths in digital innovation, long tradition in the rule of law, business-friendly environment and world class regulators has an opportunity to act as a global leader in this space. That is why we are also working closely with many of our international partners to address this shared challenge and work towards common approaches to tackling online harms (see [Objective 3.7](#)).

We will compel industry to stop the proliferation of online child sexual abuse through our victim-focused Online Harms framework

182. **In advance of regulation, the DCMS is delivering a range of business and user-support to help develop a safer online environment for children.** This includes publishing a ‘safety by design framework’ that will include practical guidance for companies to support them to design safer online services and products. The Government is also strengthening the UK’s safety tech sector so that the UK has world leading safety technology.

CASE STUDY

In 2017, the LEGO Group launched the app LEGO® Life. LEGO® Life utilises ‘safety by design’ principles, whilst showing children how to use online social platforms in a positive way, such as sharing moments with family and friends.

This approach has been strengthened recently with the introduction of Captain Safety. The character provides a safety tutorial and acts as a child’s guide throughout their time on the app, delivering safety messages at critical points, such as before sharing certain data or commenting on public posts.

183. **We will promote industry efforts to develop technology that prevents and tackles child sexual abuse online**, such as tools to identify and block online child grooming conversations, and we will continue to share information with industry partners so they can stay ahead of the threat.
184. The Government will continue to urge tech companies to prioritise the safety of children on their platforms and services alongside users’ privacy. In particular, Facebook’s proposals to apply end-to-end encryption to their messaging platforms by default presents significant challenges. While the Government supports strong encryption for protecting personal data, privacy and services such as banking, commerce and communications, we are concerned that end-to-end encryption has created significant and avoidable barriers to companies being able to identify and prevent illegal activity by child abusers. **We will continue to stress that Facebook should only implement its proposals for end-to-end encryption if the safety of its users will not be reduced, including ensuring a means for law enforcement to obtain lawful access to the content of communications.**
185. **The Government has [responded](#) to the recommendations made in the [IICSA’s Internet Investigation Report](#)**, outlining ongoing work across Government to tackle online child sexual abuse, including setting expectations for companies to keep children safe on their platforms through implementation of the [Voluntary Principles](#) alongside the

development of forthcoming Online Safety legislation. We will continue to take forward work on the Inquiry's findings on this issue.

3.3 Preventing abuse in local communities

186. As well as reducing the opportunity for perpetrators to offend online, child sexual abuse needs to be prevented where children and young people spend their time in local communities. The Government recognises that local safeguarding partners are best-placed to understand risks in their area and to implement strategies that address them, such as robust safeguarding standards in all local settings and situational prevention strategies (changing the contexts and environments in which offending can occur).
187. The Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, launched by the DfE, is already supporting the efforts of local actors, using cross-sector working to build the evidence base on innovative approaches to preventing abuse. This includes funding Hackney Council to test approaches to preventing exploitation of young people through contextual safeguarding, which seeks to address the wider social, environmental and community factors that may put a child at risk. [Evaluation reports](#) from the Programme have been published and disseminated widely to inform policy development and practice.
188. **We are also driving targeted action through the Home Office-funded Prevention Programme.** Delivered by The Children's Society, the Programme involves coordinators in each of the ten policing regions driving local and regional work to combat different types of exploitation by: collating intelligence; identifying hot spot locations; developing prevention strategies; delivering targeted interventions using contextual safeguarding, and; coordinating activity across local agencies. This work has helped increase professionals' understanding of all forms of exploitation, leading to increased victim identification and a more holistic local response.

CASE STUDY

In partnership with local forces, the prevention officers in the Wales and Yorkshire regions engaged with Currys PC World to raise awareness and upskill staff around the risks of online exploitation, providing them with safety messages to share with parents and carers at the 'point of sale'.

The prevention network has also worked with the British Transport Police (BTP) to improve their responses to child exploitation and abuse within their London custody suite. This work focused on the staff, environment and interactions with detainees, recognising the risks exploitation and abuse posed to children and young people. A number of recommendations are now being explored by BTP, including reviewing the approach to recording and sharing safeguarding and exploitation concerns in custody.

189. **Recognising findings from a number of independent reviews into child sexual abuse, the Department for Transport has introduced [Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards](#).** Focussed around safeguarding, these standards help to prevent abuse in local communities by clearly highlighting the important role of licensing authorities in protecting vulnerable children and young people.
190. **The Home Office will also work with the Contextual Safeguarding Network, National Business Crime Centre and other actors to consider what support can be given to help staff in key business sectors identify and respond to safeguarding concerns,** including risks of child sexual abuse and exploitation. We will publish guidance for businesses on contextual safeguarding principles and will consider what further training and support can be provided to key staff such as security guards.

We will strengthen local areas' understanding of and response to child sexual exploitation in communities by strengthening the Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit for safeguarding partners

191. The Home Office will strengthen the response to exploitation in communities, and to group-based child sexual exploitation specifically, by building on the findings of our research paper on this form of offending and developing an enhanced version of our widely-adopted [Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit](#). This will support safeguarding partners to develop stronger local threat assessments and place-based responses, through comprehensive guidance on prevention and disruption strategies that reflect best practice. The toolkit will promote innovative approaches and support all partners to build effective problem profiles, as well as to understand and make use of legislative and non-legislative powers that target specific risks.
192. Sadly, child sexual abuse can happen anywhere and to any child, but by raising the standard of safeguarding in institutions that work with children, we can stop offenders from getting access to children and help practitioners to identify and respond to risk. We will ensure legislation and policy is updated to support organisations to keep our children safe in the most effective way.
193. As outlined in [Objective 3.5](#), the DfE will strengthen safeguarding practice in schools through consulting on guidance and supporting Designated Safeguarding Leads.
194. **The DfE will also strengthen safeguarding standards in non-statutory settings, or “out-of-school settings”, in which children spend their time,** such as after-school clubs, faith groups and sports groups. In October 2020, the DfE published a [voluntary code of safeguarding practice](#) to help these out-of-school settings understand what they need to do to keep children safe in their care. Alongside this, the DfE published [guidance for parents and carers](#) to help them to understand which settings are safe

and has also invested over £3 million in trialling ways for local authorities to identify and intervene in out-of-school settings of concern. The final phase of this work is due to conclude in Autumn 2021 and the DfE will use its findings to disseminate best practice on the effective use of existing legislative powers and to inform consideration of further legislation that strengthens local authorities' ability to intervene.

195. We know that children in care may be at a higher risk of experiencing child sexual abuse (see [Part 2.4](#)) and must continue to do all we can to safeguard them. **The Government will make best use of the findings from the upcoming independently-led Review of Children's Social Care**, which will reshape how children interact with the care system, looking at the process from referral through to becoming looked after. It will address major challenges such as the increase in numbers of looked after children, the inconsistencies in children's social care practice, outcomes across the country, and the failure of the system to provide enough stable homes for children.
196. We must ensure that care and support settings for children who are looked after meet their needs and keep them safe. The DfE has consulted on reforms to the use of independent and semi-independent provision for children in care and care leavers, including introducing national standards and banning the placement of children under the age of 16 in this provision. **The DfE will also consider the need to strengthen standards in residential care homes and register care home staff in response to recommendations made by the IICSA.**
197. **The Government will consider findings from the MoJ's internal review of existing legislation on abuses of positions of trust.** [The Sexual Offences Act 2003](#) contains a number of offences criminalising sexual activity with children over the age of 16 but under the age of 18, by people who hold a "position of trust" even if the activity appears consensual. This aims to stop people from abusing their position to manipulate young people into sexual activity. In 2019, the MoJ carried out a review into this legislation and are committed to ensuring the law in this area works effectively.
198. **The Government has carried out work to improve faith leaders' understanding of child sexual abuse and will explore the need to support safeguarding training initiatives for faith leaders.** Through engagement with the Charity Commission, the Government has strengthened safeguarding guidance for charities and trustees in the third sector and continues to support these organisations' work, including by publishing training, resources and guidance on handling and reporting of allegations for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations.
199. Alongside raising the standards of safeguarding in institutions that work with children, **the Home Office and the MoJ will lead a cross-Government feasibility study looking at ways to create eligibility for criminal record checks for those who are self-employed**, so that all those working with children and vulnerable people are subject to the same standard of Disclosure and Barring Service checks.

3.4 Targeted support for children and young people at-risk

200. It is important to stress again that, by virtue of their age, as well as the power imbalance which exists between children and adults, all children are inherently vulnerable and can be abused. Abuse does not occur because of a child's vulnerability, but because of an offender's inclination and ability to take advantage of vulnerability. Offenders may be more likely to target children who are perceived to be particularly vulnerable and where safeguards around them may be lower (see [Part 2.4](#)). Safeguarding partners, local agencies and the Government need to work with these children and their families to raise awareness and provide support. In understanding where the most vulnerable children are situated, the Government welcomes the contribution made by the Office of the Children's Commissioner to move towards a [better understanding of regional variation](#) of vulnerabilities experienced by children and young people.
201. **To extend our targeted support for vulnerable children and families with complex needs, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has provided a further £165 million of funding for the Troubled Families Programme until 2021.** The Home Office will also work with the MHCLG to embed child sexual abuse-related outcomes and resources into the Troubled Families Programme to support prevention and early intervention.
202. COVID-19 and measures to stop its spread have made the lives of many vulnerable children and families harder. The Government has provided £3.7 billion of additional funding to local authorities to help them address the pressures they are facing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in children's social care. The Government also announced an extra £750 million of funding for frontline charities, from which the Home Office and the DfE launched the £7.6 million Vulnerable Children National Charities Strategic Relief Fund. In addition, **the DfE provided funding to Barnardo's for the See, Hear, Respond programme to provide vital support to vulnerable children, young people and families affected by COVID-19 and its restrictions.**
203. **In 2020/21 the Government is investing £9.5 million into projects aimed at boosting the educational outcomes of vulnerable children and keeping them safe from harm,** which includes £2.4 million to scale and test interventions for children with a social worker. We will also continue to drive improvements in alternative provision (AP), recognising that many children in AP have experienced trauma and adversity and require tailored support. The DfE has invested £4 million into the AP Innovation Fund, delivering projects for children in AP to achieve better outcomes, and £7 million in an AP Transition Fund to support Year 11 pupils in the context of COVID-19 to make successful transitions from AP. This sits alongside an ambitious programme to rapidly improve the availability of good AP so that permanently excluded children and children at-risk of exclusion receive a high-quality education suited to their individual needs.

The Home Office has invested a further £3.7 million into the Trusted Relationship Fund, helping children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse to develop trusting relationships with a responsible adult

204. To provide targeted support to children and young people at-risk of child sexual exploitation or abuse, as well as criminal exploitation and peer-on-peer abuse, the Home Office is investing a further £3.7 million into the Trusted Relationships Fund in 2020/21. The fund, which was launched in 2018, aims to protect children and young people by fostering healthy, trusting relationships with responsible adults. The eleven local authority-led projects vary in focus, offering a range of support: from providing direct one-to-one support and group-based activities through to system-level change. Findings from the first two years show that the demographics of the cohort supported are broadly representative of the wider local community, with some overrepresentations compared to the national average (for example, children with special educational needs (SEND)). **Through an independent, programme-wide evaluation of the Trusted Relationships Fund, we will continue to build the evidence base on what works to protect young people, as well as the impact of COVID-19 and any adaptations projects have made.**
205. Assessing the impact of interventions such as these can be challenging. When assessing a young person's risk, an unchanged or increased risk level may not indicate a negative outcome. It may, for example, indicate a higher level of trust as the young person has disclosed more information to the professional. Building a trusting relationship between a child and project worker is not a linear process and can require time. Evidence suggests that a trusted relationship can support improved wellbeing and personal development such as engagement with education and employment opportunities, and having enhanced relationships with peers, family and professionals.

CASE STUDY

Having twice been placed on a care plan, firstly for neglect and then emotional abuse, Suzy was referred to a Trusted Relationships project after being assessed as at risk of sexual exploitation. Agencies were concerned about regular missing episodes, poor school attendance and about older men whom may have been grooming her. Work began with regular catch ups and time together to build up rapport, including activities to build Suzy's confidence in learning new skills, such as cooking. The team worked holistically with Suzy and her mum, her school and social worker to make a plan to stabilise her school attendance and to support her to remain in education post-16, help Suzy develop positive relationships with peers her own age, and to stop arguments at home that had previously resulted in her going missing. Suzy is now closed to Children's Social Care and the risk to her of sexual exploitation has been reduced.

206. We know that offenders also take advantage of children's perceived vulnerabilities online and that certain groups of children can be particularly at-risk. **The Home Office has provided funding to South West Grid for Learning and Internet Matters to develop their [Inclusive Digital Safety Hub](#), designed to decrease the risk of online abuse, including child sexual abuse, perpetrated against children with vulnerabilities such as children with special educational needs (SEND), LGBTQ+ children, and children in care.** The Hub provides support for children themselves, their parents and carers, and the frontline professionals who work with them to keep them safe online. We will continue to deepen our understanding of vulnerabilities to child sexual abuse, how they play-out online and what works to reduce risk, including for LGBTQ+ children and those with SEND.

“Everyone kept telling me stuff was wrong or bad - to stop doing it. Trouble was I didn't know what was ok. I knew things were wrong because I was being told that but not why or even what was ok. I kept making mistakes until I was told what was healthy. Once I knew, it really helped to get things right instead.”

Male, age 16

207. We know that children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour also need targeted support to ensure their safeguarding and welfare needs are met, and to reduce the risk they may pose to themselves and others (see [Parts 2.5](#) and [2.7](#)). Harmful sexual behaviour exists on a spectrum, and professional responses need to be tailored accordingly. **The Home Office has funded the Lucy Faithfull Foundation to develop and expand their child sexual abuse preventative resources, including a [harmful sexual behaviour toolkit](#) to help parents, carers and professionals recognise and respond as well as know where to go for support.** We will expand our evidence base on best practice in responding to harmful sexual behaviour, including peer-on-peer abuse in schools.
208. Through the CSA Centre and Support for Victims of Child Sexual Abuse fund, **the Home Office is also supporting work to develop our understanding of the nature and consequences of sibling sexual abuse**, and to improve the response to this form of abuse which professionals can find particularly challenging.
209. It is important to recognise that some children and young people remanded or sentenced to youth custody will have been subject to sexual abuse; their position as victims and survivors should be acknowledged, and their safeguarding and support needs must be met. Separately, there are also a group of children held in the secure estate for welfare reasons under [the Children Act 1989](#). These Children and young people, who may also have been subject to sexual abuse, often have complex physical, mental, and emotional behavioural needs. They may require support and intervention to address their behaviour, which may be a result of trauma, severe neglect, or multi-layered, unmet and complex needs.
210. We know that different forms of vulnerability often overlap, and that perpetrators may subject children and young people to multiple forms of abuse, such as criminal exploitation (including county lines) and sexual exploitation. Protecting children and young people from different types of exploitation therefore plays a key role in preventing child sexual abuse. **The Government will make significant investments into initiatives to prevent and tackle young people's involvement in violent crime, including through the £200 million Youth Endowment Fund to be distributed over 10 years, and £70 million across 2019/20 and 2020/21 into the establishment of Violence Reduction Units.** In addition, as part of the £25 million programme to tackle county lines, we are investing significantly in specialist support for young people who are affected by this form of exploitation.

Missing incidents as an indicator of child sexual exploitation

In 2018/19, the police responded to 199,634 missing incidents related to children, which accounted for 62% of the total missing incidents recorded in England and Wales. While most children who go missing will return home safely, missing incidents can be an indicator of a range of harms, including child sexual exploitation. Both the police and charities, including Missing People, list sexual exploitation as one of the most common reasons given by children for going missing. Repeated missing incidents indicate a particularly high level of vulnerability to child sexual exploitation and there is strong evidence linking children in care who go missing and those being groomed or sexually exploited.

While this Strategy seeks to tackle child sexual abuse in all its forms and address one of the key underlying factors behind children going missing, the Government will continue to work with the police, NCA and other statutory and non-statutory organisations to improve our response to children who go missing and to reduce the risk posed to these children. The relevant actions we are taking include:

- Working with the NPCC lead for missing persons to support effective, risk-based police responses to missing children incidents.
- Improving the quality of missing persons data that police can access, delivered as part of the new Law Enforcement Data Service.
- Improving the efficiency and reach of the Child Rescue Alert (CRA), delivered by the NCA on behalf of UK policing. The CRA is a partnership between the police, media and the public to safely locate a high-risk missing child, when there is a real, immediate risk to their life.
- Supporting the voluntary sector to provide vital support for missing children at risk of abuse and exploitation, for example Missing People's 24/7 helpline, TestSafe and SafeCall (supporting children, young people and families concerned about county lines exploitation) services.

3.5 Strengthening early identification and intervention in child sexual abuse cases

211. In recent years, there has been extensive work to drive the identification of, and intervention in, all forms of child abuse. **Recognising evidence (see [Part 2.2](#)) around historic difficulties identifying and responding to child sexual abuse, particularly in an intra-familial environment, the Government will work to equip professionals working directly with children with the understanding and skills they need to identify this child sexual abuse.** This is particularly important in the context of COVID-19 which may have exacerbated the risk of certain types of child sexual abuse (see [Part 2.10](#)).

We will invest in strengthening safeguarding practice across different sectors, including driving consistent standard of skills and knowledge in Children's Social Care to respond to child sexual abuse

212. **There is work to improve safeguarding across the health system.** NHSEI and Health Education England will review mandatory safeguarding training for all health professionals and strengthen the safeguarding component of the standard NHS provider contract. In addition, NHSEI will launch a new Safeguarding Commissioning Assurance Toolkit to support local commissioners to make improvements and embed a contextual safeguarding approach. The NHS has also injected £15 million to strengthen mental health support for its staff, recognising the importance of protecting the wellbeing of all NHS staff during this particularly difficult period of COVID-19, and to ensure they are able to deliver services effectively, including safeguarding.
213. To strengthen safeguarding practice in schools, the DfE will consult on proposed changes to guidance on Keeping Children Safe in Education, including responding to child sexual abuse, harmful sexual behaviour and peer-on-peer abuse; this will build on updates made to the guidance in September 2020. **As well as updating guidance, the Government will seek to support school Designated Safeguarding Leads across England and Wales to identify and respond appropriately to child sexual abuse through sharing CSA Centre practice resources for education settings.**

CASE STUDY

After a school in Wiltshire introduced contextual safeguarding, staff noticed two female pupils with expensive bags. The school recognised this as a potentially concerning sign and contacted Wiltshire's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and Emerald Child Exploitation team. A multi-agency meeting was held to understand the two pupils' peer networks, which identified links between a number of young people and an adult male. Using phone data, the Emerald team was able to locate the adult male and young people at a specific place and, after further investigation, prosecuted him for sexual exploitation.

214. To ensure youth workers are equipped to support children and young people and to identify and respond to all forms of abuse, the National Youth Agency is developing training for all youth workers to detect signs of trauma and exploitation, including child sexual abuse. In September 2020, it also published its [revised national curriculum for youth work](#) containing a dedicated section on 'healthy relationships' and information on specific safeguarding issues.
215. In Children's Social Care, the DfE will build on the [Putting Children First](#) strategy, collaborating with local authorities and across the workforce to drive a consistent level of skill, knowledge and understanding through workforce reforms, a stronger system of accountability and investment via the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme.
216. **The DfE will continue to improve children's social workers' ability to identify and respond appropriately to child sexual abuse by influencing pre and post qualification training and pathways.** This will include working in partnership with Government-funded fast track training programmes to improve provision of child sexual abuse content; working closely with Teaching Partnerships; ensuring child sexual abuse-specific material is included in the National Assessment and Accreditation System, and exploring a roll-out of harms-specific training, including through the CSA Centre.
217. Child and family social workers are an essential part of the workforce engaged in tackling child sexual abuse. Carrying out such challenging and sensitive work can impact on their wellbeing and, as a result, capacity to carry out their work. This is especially difficult during COVID-19. We are working with our high-performing Partner in Practice local authorities to identify and share good practice in providing the right support to staff to maintain their physical and mental wellbeing. We also continue to fund activity that promotes social worker wellbeing more broadly. This includes programmes to develop social work leaders who support the wellbeing of their teams, the Happier Healthier Professionals programme led by the What Works Centre for Children's Social Care, and social worker health check, providing local authorities with a better understanding of workforce wellbeing.

218. **Some victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation will also be victims of modern slavery. To ensure victims and survivors are supported, we have expanded Independent Child Trafficking Guardians (ICTGs) to one third of local authorities**, providing advice and support to trafficked children and working with multi-agency partners to advocate on behalf of the child. The Home Office will continue the national roll out of ICTGs as part of the National Referral Mechanism Transformation Programme and we will continue to review how the needs of individual children are best met at a local level through the programme.
219. **To go further to identify child sexual abuse and support victims and survivors, the Home Office is funding the CSA Centre to develop and test a range of training programmes and resources, including trauma-informed approaches.** This work includes: [Practice Leads](#) training in multi-agency settings, one day training in local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, as well as work to strengthen initial training received by professionals.
220. **The Home Office has also funded the CSA Centre to develop a Child Sexual Abuse Pathway to clearly outline the process to follow and actions required to safeguard children where child sexual abuse is a concern.** It will bring clarity to key decision points, provide tailored resources to support practitioners undertaking this work, and further improve professionals' responses to child sexual abuse by providing a pathway grounded in evidence and centred on the needs and perspectives of children and young people.

CASE STUDY

The CSA Practice Leads Programme, delivered by the Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, is an intensive programme of training and development which builds practitioners' understanding and confidence in identifying and responding to concerns of child sexual abuse, and supports them to share and spread their learning within their services:

"I feel the course has absolutely enhanced my practice. Recently, I had a referral that at first seemed quite "low level". However, following the course, I felt really confident in evidencing why the case needed to be escalated."

221. Whilst safeguarding partners often rely on professionals who see children regularly to identify changes in their behaviour and refer safeguarding concerns, anyone who interacts with children can help to identify abuse. The importance of this has become more pronounced in the context of COVID-19 and children spending less time with trusted professionals outside of their homes. **To build awareness during this period, the Government distributed a short guide to over 25,000 organisations and local community partners – including supermarkets, postal workers and transport providers – to help them identify and report safeguarding concerns during the pandemic.** The Government also provided the NSPCC with £1.6 million to expand and

promote their helpline for adults to report safeguarding concerns. The helpline saw an immediate 40% increase in contacts handled by the service, and levels have remained well above baseline levels.

222. **The DfE has also re-started activity based upon their existing [Together, we can tackle child abuse](#) campaign**, focusing on helping the public and professionals to understand and identify the complex signs of abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse, and to provide reassurance about discussing concerns and making referrals. The campaign's social media activity is supported by a toolkit and resources supplied to local authorities and other key stakeholders, amplifying the campaign's messages and enhancing the safeguarding potential of the public, including through an additional asset focused on identifying online child sexual abuse.
223. Recognising evidence that BAME victims and survivors of child sexual abuse are under-represented when compared to local demographics, and may face particular barriers to disclosing and accessing support (see [Part 2.2](#)), **we will seek to raise awareness within BAME communities of child sexual abuse and the support available through targeted community engagement.**

“I think I just played up a lot hoping that someone would ask me what was wrong. When they did, I told them and got some help.”

Female, age 15

3.6 Driving multi-agency working and information sharing to assess risk, intervene early and prevent harm

224. The responsibility for identifying and responding to child sexual abuse does not rest with one Government department or agency. Nationally, there is a duty on all Secretaries of State to promote the wellbeing of all children in England. **The DfE, DHSC and Home Office have a particular responsibility to work together to ensure that local leaders across health, police and local councils are operating effectively in the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements established in 2018.**
225. For children suffering sexual abuse, it is critical that safeguarding partners work with each other effectively to identify and protect them. The Government considers these multi-agency arrangements the bedrock of a higher-performing child protection system. Sir Alan Wood, who led the review of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, has been commissioned to support local partners with the reforms and review progress in implementing the new arrangements. Building on the recommendations from his interim report on implementation, Government departments have developed a delivery

plan to ensure continuous improvements at the local level by targeting: leadership and engagement; best practice and partnerships; and monitoring and evaluation.

As part of new local safeguarding partnership arrangements, we will introduce facilitators for each of the three statutory services now partnered together to drive continuous improvement

226. **Through the Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme, the Home Office is also funding a national facilitator on safeguarding partnership reform to support police forces in implementing the new arrangements.** We will continue this funding, and the DHSC and the DfE have supported similar national facilitators for health and local authorities, helping us to drive forward our delivery plan.
227. **We will continue to support local authority safeguarding partners to work together more effectively in responding to all forms of exploitation and extrafamilial harm, including through the DfE's Tackling Child Exploitation Support Programme.** This £2 million programme helps local areas improve their strategic response, identify risk and develop local solutions to safeguard children experiencing exploitation, including sexual exploitation.
228. Service transformation in local authorities will also continue to be supported by the Troubled Families Programme, using the Service Transformation Grant and Early Help System Guide to promote stronger partnership working and better use of data in early help services.
229. **The Home Office will place new duties on a range of agencies, such as the police, local government, youth offending, and health and probation, to work collaboratively to prevent and reduce serious violence.** When defining the scope of their plans, local areas will have the flexibility to consider other crime types, which may include child sexual abuse.
230. It is vital that safeguarding partners share information, knowledge and insight to assess risk and prevent harm. Nothing should stand in the way of sharing information when there are concerns for a child's safety. **Government departments commissioned a user-research project to better understand the barriers to information sharing between safeguarding partners and other agencies, and is taking forward recommendations on updating guidance and sharing best practice in this space.** We will also build on this user-research to explore how technology is currently being used to build a picture of the risk to a child and will make recommendations for how it can be made more efficient. This includes expanding the Child Protection Information Sharing system from unscheduled healthcare settings to all health settings, including GPs, by 2023, in line with the NHS [Long Term Plan](#).

231. At a national level, responsibility for learning lessons from serious safeguarding incidents sits with the independent Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, with oversight for all serious incidents notified by local authorities. The Panel commissions national reviews of serious child safeguarding cases, considering issues that are complex or of national importance, which can include child sexual abuse cases. It works closely with local safeguarding partners to identify and share learning that can enable practice improvements to better protect children from harm.
232. As outlined in [Objective 2](#), Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements also exists to provide for effective information sharing between Responsible Authorities and Duty to Cooperate agencies involved in the management of registered sex offenders and safeguarding of children.

3.7 Working internationally to prevent child sexual abuse and tackling transnational child sex offending

233. Child sexual abuse is a borderless crime. We know that offenders are increasingly targeting children in other countries by travelling abroad to perpetrate abuse, using the internet to livestream abuse from other countries and hosting images of abuse on online networks around the world. As set out in [Part 1: Our Principles and Framework](#), taking an international approach to tackling child sexual abuse is therefore key to our whole-system, strategic response.
234. The UK is proud to be recognised as the world leader in our response to child sexual abuse - the Independent Economist Intelligence Unit's [Out of the Shadows](#) Index on child sexual abuse and exploitation, published in 2020, gave the UK's response to child sexual abuse the highest score of all 60 countries assessed. We will remain at the forefront of international action.
235. **Central to preventing and responding effectively to child sexual abuse is adopting a global approach, combining international cooperation with common global standards**, such as the [Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (also known as the Lanzarote Convention) which the UK ratified in 2018 and will continue to report against.
236. The internet can be used to facilitate child sexual abuse across the world and online abuse can act as a precursor to offenders travelling abroad to abuse children. **As part of the Home Office's response, it has been the sole financial donor to the WeProtect Global Alliance since its inception, which plays an integral role internationally in driving awareness of, and best practice responses to, online child sexual abuse.** This includes by promoting the adoption of the [Model National Response for Preventing and Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#) and the [Global Strategic Response to Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#). The Alliance is now an independent body, which the Home Office will continue to play an integral role in - galvanising action through our permanent seat on the WeProtect Global Alliance Board.

237. Outside of the WPGA, The Home Office has developed a network of multilateral and bilateral engagements to enhance the effectiveness of efforts to combat child sexual abuse both at home and around the world, including through the Five Country Ministerial - an annual conference bringing together the interior Ministers of Five Eyes Countries including the UK, United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We have utilised this forum to drive work to tackle online child sexual abuse, including to collaborate with industry partners in develop the [Voluntary Principles](#) (see [Objective 3.2](#)).
238. **We will continue to use the Five Country Ministerial, as well as other multilateral and bilateral forums and our diplomatic network, to raise the global profile of child sexual abuse and advance efforts to tackle all forms of online child sexual abuse.** This includes building on our successful engagement with countries to combat the hosting of child sexual abuse material on the internet.
239. **Law enforcement will also continue to tackle child sexual abuse globally through the NCA's membership of the Virtual Global Taskforce,** an international alliance of law enforcement agencies, NGOs and industry partners working together to reduce the global threat from online sexual abuse and other forms of transnational child sexual offending.
240. Alongside work at the global level, it is key that the Government continues to drive efforts to prevent child sexual abuse at a country-level, including through sharing insight and technology with other countries where appropriate.
241. The UK's overseas diplomatic network supports access to governments, operational partners, multilateral institutions and NGOs to improve coordination and advocate for the adoption of best practice standards. The creation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) will help to increase the UK's overall impact - strengthening and aligning efforts to tackle child sexual abuse by combining development and diplomatic expertise, levers and networks.
242. The Government will use relevant international initiatives to tackle child sexual abuse in a joined-up and cohesive way, and will work through the diplomatic network to raise the global profile of the issue. **This includes building the evidence base on innovative practices to prevent and respond to sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment of children and adults, including in the international aid sector, and sharing best practice through the FCDO-funded [Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub](#).**
243. In addition, the Government has bolstered its overseas response to child sexual abuse through the cross-government network known as SOCnet, jointly run by the Home Office and the FCDO. This network provides enhanced serious organised crime (SOC) policy coordination and advice in priority regions, coordinating a full-spectrum response that includes diplomatic and programme activity. We will leverage SOCnet's regional expertise to strengthen our overseas response to child sexual abuse.
244. **We will also work with global partners, including the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, and through relevant UK international aid programmes** to help improve child protection in key at-risk countries.

CASE STUDY

The End Violence Against Children Fund has invested in Thorn - an NGO using tech solutions to stop child sexual abuse online - to develop a tool to support investigations on the dark web and help law enforcement identify victims and survivors. Thorn has trained over 1,200 law enforcement officers in 55 countries to use this technology, which has played a key role in safeguarding 1,792 children and arresting 1,151 offenders.

Tackling transnational child sex offenders action plan

In January 2020, the IICSA [published the report](#) for phase 2 of its investigation into the extent to which institutions and organisations based in England and Wales have taken seriously their responsibilities to protect children outside the UK from sexual abuse. The report included recommendations for the Government, including developing a national plan of action to address child sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated overseas by UK nationals and residents of England and Wales. The Government has accepted this recommendation in its response to the Inquiry's recommendations, published in January 2021; here, we set out what that plan comprises.

Activity outlined in Objective 3.7 will be key to tackling transnational child sex offenders (TCSOs). Preventative measures are central to protecting children from harm, as we know that offenders increasingly take advantage of areas with weaker child protection systems, law enforcement responses, or infrastructure and control (including following humanitarian disasters) to perpetrate abuse against vulnerable children abroad.

Effectively tackling TCSOs also requires a robust offender management system here in the UK. Objective 2 outlines the steps the Government is taking to strengthen multi-agency working to manage offenders, such as by improving the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) process and shared database, and commits to ensuring the police-led management of sex offenders in the community under MAPPA works effectively. These actions sit alongside the wider package of work to improve management of sex offenders, including their travel abroad, by strengthening existing civil orders and enabling a tailored approach to risk management. To specifically address the threat of sex offenders travelling to abuse children abroad, we will enhance these efforts through further actions:

- **The Government will build its understanding of key countries vulnerable to UK nationals and residents travelling to them to abuse children, and will continue to explore opportunities to strengthen the management of registered sex offenders prior to travel.** As recommended by the IICSA, the Home Office has commissioned the NCA to develop a list of countries where children are considered to be at high risk of sexual abuse and exploitation from UK nationals and residents.

The list will be made available to the police and courts to assist them when they are considering the need for foreign travel prohibitions as part of civil orders.

- **The Home Office has been investing over £4 million per year in tackling TCSOs through various partner organisations**, including £2.96 million to the NCA to target high-harm offenders in high-risk countries. A key part of this effort is the International Justice Mission's and NCA's work with the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center, set up in 2019 to tackle the live-streaming of sexual abuse.
- **The Government will drive work to reduce the opportunity for TCSOs to target children abroad, ensuring that organisations with footprints overseas, such as those working in the aid sector, have the right safeguards in place.** We will develop INTERPOL Threat Assessments to ensure that the aid sector is aware of key threats, including child sexual abuse, in priority countries. In September 2020, the Government also launched the [UK Strategy: Safeguarding Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment within the Aid Sector](#) (in line with the [Development Assistant Committee's Recommendation on Ending Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment \(SEAH\)](#); the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee Minimum Operating Standards on Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse](#); UN international SEAH standards; and [Child Protection Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Action](#)). This sets out the UK's actions, across all Government departments that deliver Official Development Assistance, to prevent sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment from occurring, and to respond appropriately where it does.
- **The Home Office will ensure that explanatory guidance and communications are clear about the key role played by the International Child Protection Certificate plays**, supporting organisations to safely recruit individuals for work and volunteering outside the UK.
- **We will bring TCSOs to justice by supporting prosecutions by local law enforcement through the NCA's International Liaison Officer Network**, which enables the sharing of intelligence and coordination of the law enforcement response to support UK operational activity against child sexual abuse. This is alongside law enforcement partners' use of Section 72 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, where appropriate, to allow UK individuals who offend overseas to be prosecuted in the UK. **We will continue to notify overseas authorities of TCSOs' travel to or presence in a country, providing sufficient information for local law enforcement to take informed and appropriate action.**
- **As a Government, we will also continue to build our understanding of transnational child sex offending through collaboration with the NCA, intelligence community and the third sector.**
- **Law enforcement partners at the forefront of tackling TCSOs will continue to implement, review and update the law enforcement response through preventative and operational measures**, including updating guidance where necessary and through continuous professional development..

CASE STUDY

A UK citizen came to the attention of the NCA after a guest at the Kenyan hotel at which he was staying filed a report to the NCA's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Unit in the UK sharing concerns about their behaviour while in the company of a number of young local girls. The NCA's investigation into the individual - which involved collaboration with the Kenyan National Police, the National Kenyan Police Child Protection Unit, the FCDO and CPS - led to him being charged under Section 72 with sexual offences including: multiple counts of rape of a female under 16 years; sexual assault on a female under 16 years; sexual assault by penetration of a female aged 13 and over; and, perverting the course of justice. On 18 July 2018, the individual was sentenced to 18 years and six months imprisonment.

3.8 Supporting all victims and survivors

245. The Government is absolutely committed to ensuring access to high quality support for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, wherever they live in the country and regardless of whether the the abuse is recent or non-recent (in this section, we use “non-recent” to refer to abuse experienced by adults before the age of 18). Improving the quality and consistency of support for all victims and survivors of sexual abuse is central to both the [Strategic Direction for Sexual Assault and Abuse Services](#) and the cross-Government [Victims Strategy](#).
246. Child sexual abuse can have devastating and wide-ranging consequences for victims and survivors (see [Part 2.5](#)). As a result, victims and survivors of both recent and non-recent abuse will require different forms of care and support depending on their circumstances, how they wish to access help, the pace of their recovery and the level of support they receive when they disclose their abuse. There is no ‘one-size fits all’ approach. The support accessed by victims and survivors encompasses a broad range of statutory and non-statutory services funded by several different local commissioners (local authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)) and national commissioners (NHSEI, the MoJ, the Home Office). Regardless of the type of support being accessed, victims and survivors stress the importance of being listened to, respected, believed and not judged.
247. Unfortunately, we know that victims and survivors are not always able to access the support they need and that services can be disjointed and difficult to navigate. For service providers, particularly in the voluntary sector, there are also challenges operating in a fragmented commissioning landscape with funding available from multiple local and national commissioners.

248. **In response to this challenge, the Government is developing a Victims Funding Strategy to place the victim support sector on a more sustainable footing.** The Victims Funding Strategy will be underpinned by a new delivery model to ensure there is a joined-up approach to funding at both a national and local level to maximise the impact of the support we provide. A key part of this work will be to look at the barriers tailored services face in delivering the support that victims and survivors with protected characteristics rely on. **We will also work across Government to review the landscape of third sector sexual violence support services across England and Wales to identify gaps in provision for child sexual abuse and focus funding accordingly.**

We will utilise the £2.8 million Child Sexual Abuse Support Services Transformation Fund to embed best practice, improve the quality of support to children of all backgrounds, and build our understanding of what works to support victims and survivors

249. The Government has already provided significant additional investment in support services for child sexual abuse. **The Home Office and the MoJ have doubled the funding available to national voluntary sector organisations through the Support for Victims and Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse fund, to £2.4 million from 2020 to 2022.** This funding is enabling a range of vital national services to support child and adult victims and survivors, including: support lines; in-person and remote counselling; online psychoeducation resources; training for professionals working with victims; and specialist support to children with disabilities. Funding is also going to organisations providing support to non-abusing parents and carers, recognising the vital role that they play in the recovery of children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse.

CASE STUDY

Carly, who is autistic and non-verbal, was sexually abused by her maternal grandfather over several years. Carly's grandfather exploited her disability and it took time for the abuse she was suffering to be discovered and fully understood.

Funded through the Home Office's Support for Victims and Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse Fund, the NSPCC's Letting the Future In programme has developed therapeutic support for those aged 4 to 19 with learning disabilities who have been sexually abused. The programme provides support that pays particular attention to the child's preferred way of communicating, with more emphasis on creative play, art and drama, and allows therapy to be run at the young person's pace.

Carly's parents have seen a real change in their daughter since her time with her NSPCC practitioner: *"She is so different now. She smiles, goes to college and will go out to meet friends."*

250. In 2020 the Home Office launched a new £2.8 million Child Sexual Abuse Support Services Transformation Fund to enable statutory and non-statutory organisations to promote and embed best practice in supporting children and young people who have experienced sexual abuse, and to build our understanding of what works to support victims and survivors. Projects supported through the fund are helping to: improve the quality of support to children and young people, including for those from BAME backgrounds; address barriers to accessing pre-trial support; and improve multi-agency working between commissioners, providers and communities.
251. **In recognition of the vital role played by the voluntary sector, in 2020 the MoJ invested an additional £4 million in sexual violence support services through the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund – increasing it by 50%, from £8 million to £12 million a year from 2020.** Since 2019, the grant-funding period has also been extended to three years to provide greater security and sustainability in core funding for voluntary sector partners. £1.88 million of this funding is ring-fenced specifically for support for victims and survivors of recent and non-recent child sexual abuse.

“They [Barnardo’s] took the time to get to know me, not just what had happened to me or the thing I had done. That helped me the most, I think. Lots of other people had tried to talk to me about it but they just went straight to it, you know, like... “tell me about x” and I couldn’t. I just couldn’t do it that way”

Female, age 15

252. **The MoJ also allocated £4.8 million in 2020/21 to PCCs to specifically commission services for victims and survivors of recent and non-recent child sexual abuse across their communities, as well as an additional £4 million per year to recruit more Independent Sexual Violence Advisers (ISVAs) across England and Wales** – this includes the recruitment of children and young people’s ISVAs to provide children who have experienced sexual abuse with the support they need to cope and recover, and to navigate the criminal justice system.
253. As recognised in the [Prime Minister’s Virtual Summit on Hidden Harms](#) in 2020, the impact of COVID-19 and social distancing measures have exacerbated feelings of isolation amongst many victims and survivors of abuse. It has also presented significant challenges to those organisations providing vital support. As part of the additional £750 million announced by the Chancellor to support the charity sector during the COVID-19 crisis, **the MoJ invested £10 million to ensure that victims and survivors of sexual violence could continue to access advice and support during the pandemic and organisations could recruit more staff, adapt to remote counselling methods and keep helplines open for longer.**
254. Many victims and survivors will choose to access or be referred for support from Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) whose services include crisis care, forensic medical examination, sexual healthcare and referral for therapeutic counselling. **To improve support for victims and survivors accessing SARC services, including paediatric provision, we have increased spending from £31 million in 2018 to £39 million in 2020/21.**
255. Recognising that victims and survivors may first seek help through universal health services, like their GP, and require support from statutory mental health services, we want to encourage all healthcare professionals and organisations to take trauma-informed approaches. This includes understanding the wide-ranging impacts and manifestations of child sexual abuse, as well as how to respond to a disclosure of abuse. NHSEI are developing training materials on trauma-informed approaches, including spotting signs of violence, abuse and poor mental health.

256. **NHSEI has extensive plans in place to improve access to mental health provision for children and adults, and a key aspect of the [Strategic Direction for Sexual Abuse and Assault Services](#) is equipping the health workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills to work with all victims and survivors of sexual abuse.** NHSEI is planning to test and develop models of extended mental health provision for adults with complex mental health needs directly attributable to their experience of sexual assault or abuse, as part of its commitment to providing trauma-informed care to victims and survivors.

“It has taken ten years for a health professional to realise that I don’t have a personality disorder, rather that I need to unlearn skills I taught myself to survive child abuse.”

Adult victim/survivor

257. Whilst local commissioners are best placed to understand the level of need in their area and to commission services for victims and survivors accordingly, national Government has a role to play in helping them perform this duty. In 2019, the Home Office published a Commissioning Framework for all commissioners of child sexual abuse support services. We will review and update this framework and seek further opportunities to share knowledge and commissioning best practice from around the country. **We will support commissioners to deliver services that meet the needs of all parts of the local community, regardless of their racial, cultural or socio-economic background, including developing new guidance for PCCs on effectively supporting racial and ethnic minorities through the local victim support services they commission.**
258. As part of the forthcoming Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, we will also ensure that the National Statement of Expectation remains up to date and effective, setting out what actions local areas need to put in place to ensure victims and survivors of violence against women and girls, including sexual abuse, can get the help and support they need.
259. **The Government recognises that sexual violence also has a lasting impact on men and boys, and we will continue to work with partners across local and national government, the police, and the third sector to support male victims and survivors.** Through funding to rape and sexual violence support services, the number of PCCs across the country with Government-funded support for males has increased from 11 to 41. We have funded the National Male Survivor Helpline run by [Safeline](#); the [National Male Survivors Online Helpline and Webchat Service](#) run by Survivors UK; and supported a new [online resource](#) developed by Mankind UK, which offers self-help resources and signposts support for men who have experienced unwanted sexual experiences, including child sexual abuse. In addition, we will update the Male Victims

Position Paper and strengthen our commitment to support the increasing number of male victims and survivors who come forward to report crimes captured in the forthcoming Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Strategy, including non-recent child sexual abuse.

260. In response to the impact of sexual assault and harassment in the aid sector, highlighted in [Objective 3.7](#), we will implement a programme of support to victims and survivors related to the international aid sector, and work with the UN Victims' Advocate to develop international coherence on support for victims and survivors.
261. **To improve access to support, it is essential that victims and survivors, non-abusing parents and carers, as well as professionals working with children know about the support available. COVID-19 has reinforced this need and we are progressing several targeted initiatives to address it:**
- NHSEI will raise awareness about the role and accessibility of SARCs amongst all parts of the community, including LGBTQ+ and BAME communities.
 - The MoJ will deliver a communications campaign to raise awareness of sexual violence support services among victims and survivors, including adult survivors of non-recent child sexual abuse, as announced at the Hidden Harms Summit in 2020.
 - For children and young people at risk of sexual abuse, and with less access to trusted adults outside the family as a result of COVID-19, the Home Office in collaboration with other Government departments and third sector has developed a campaign - [Something's Not Right](#) - directing children via social media to advice and help from a trusted service, adult or friend.
262. **The Government is committed to providing victims and survivors of child sexual abuse with the support they need regardless of whether they have been able or have chosen to report their abuse. Where individuals do choose to pursue a criminal justice outcome, whether they are a child or adult survivor, it is essential they are supported throughout this process.** This is not only important for a victim's wellbeing but will help criminal justice agencies to gather best evidence, improving the prospect of charges and convictions.

"I told one person but then I had to tell some others too. I asked if my worker could sit in with me - she didn't say anything but just knowing she was there helped me. I didn't know, but I was squeezing her hand really tightly when I was talking to the police. She told me afterwards and said I did really well. We laugh about her red hands now. It helped having her there"

Female, age 11

263. **The MoJ has published a [new, revised Victims' Code](#) setting out twelve key overarching rights.** These are clear, concise and easy to understand, setting out the level of service that victims can expect to receive from criminal justice agencies. The Code also includes a new right for eligible victims to be automatically referred to the Victim Contact Scheme. It will come into force on 1 April 2021 to allow criminal justice agencies time to embed any changes. The MoJ has also committed to consult on a Victims' Law that will guarantee that victims receive their rights under the Code and agencies are held to account for delivering them.
264. **Recognising the need to provide extra support throughout the criminal justice process to children and vulnerable adult victims, we will continue to increase the use of the full range of special measures for them,** subject to judicial discretion on applications made to the Court. These measures include Visually Recorded Interviews (Achieving Best Evidence), live court links and registered intermediaries. During 2020, we extended the availability of Section 28 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 to be in every Crown Court in England and Wales, allowing vulnerable witnesses to visually record their cross-examination before trial. We have also introduced an updated protocol for remote video link sites alongside a new booking process, assisting witnesses to give their best evidence in an approved location away from court.
265. **Drawing on international best practice, we are also developing specialist child-centred support for victims and survivors of sexual abuse. [The Lighthouse in Camden](#) is a pilot initiative collectively supported by the Home Office, NHSEI, the DfE and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime.** Based on the Nordic 'Barnahus' ('Child House') model, the multi-disciplinary service offers a holistic assessment of a child's needs and provides advocacy, medical care, social care, therapeutic and criminal justice support to both children and their non-abusing parents and carers, delivered by a team of statutory and voluntary sector organisations within a single child-friendly setting. The Lighthouse uses innovative measures to support children with the criminal justice process, including Achieving Best Evidence interviews conducted by trained clinical psychologists (with police support); live-court links from the Lighthouse to minimise the trauma to children of appearing in court for cross-examination; and, embedded Police Liaison Officers providing advice and liaison with local agencies and services.
266. Building on the learning from the Lighthouse pilot phase, which is set to run until March 2022, we will publish guidance for local commissioners and service providers seeking to introduce 'Child House' models of support to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, and will consider how national and local funding can support the development of similar local initiatives.

CASE STUDY

Max, aged 11, and his sister Victoria, aged 10 with a learning difficulty, were taken to The Lighthouse for their Achieving Best Evidence interview after Victoria disclosed at school that her step-father had been sexually abusing her and her brother.

Victoria and Max were greeted by two advocates in a child friendly environment. Victoria gave an interview that day, but her brother was reluctant to talk. After a period of sessions with his own advocate, Max also felt able to give an Achieving Best Evidence interview. The Lighthouse were able to release all relevant notes (medical, therapeutic and advocacy) quickly to support a speedy police investigation, and the high quality evidence gathered in The Lighthouse environment meant that, within six months, the CPS were able to charge their step-father, who pleaded guilty and was convicted without the need for the children to be cross-examined in court.

267. Victims and survivors of sexual abuse will often need access to therapeutic support through different stages of the criminal justice system. However, we know there can be a perception that providing pre-trial therapy will damage the prosecution's case, leaving victims and survivors without the support they need and are entitled to. **The CPS is updating guidance on this issue, emphasising the importance of victim wellbeing and encouraging prompt access to therapy to assist recovery and the provision of best evidence in criminal proceedings.**

“I was told I wasn't allowed to talk about my experiences with anyone because it could damage the live investigation and be used against me in court, as it is seen as coaching or rehearsing. So I was stuck by myself to try and comprehend and emotionally overcome the worst thing that has ever happened to me, without any support. This led to me battling with mental health issues”

Female, age 19

268. **Lastly, it is important that victims and survivors are aware of, and able to effectively access, redress for the abuse they have suffered, including through compensation where appropriate.** We have amended the state-funded Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme to abolish the pre-1979 “same-roof” rule. Following a broad review and a public consultation on reforms to the Scheme, the Government will publish its response in due course and lay a new Scheme in Parliament for approval. Work is also ongoing to speed-up the process of determining compensation and to improve handling of complex and sensitive claims, such as for child sexual abuse. We have [responded to the IICSA’s recommendations on accountability and reparations](#), including a proposal to explore why courts make low numbers of criminal compensation orders in cases of child sexual abuse, and how we can improve access to redress through the civil courts.

Glossary

Abuse is a form of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can include ill treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill treatment of others. This can be particularly relevant for example in relation to the impact on children of all forms of domestic abuse. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children. As taken from the Department for Education's [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

Child refers to any person under the age of 18 years.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) 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. As taken from the Department for Education's [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) 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 through the use of technology. As taken from the Department for Education's [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) refers to any representation by whatever means of a child engaged in real or simulated explicit sexual activities or any representation of the sexual parts of a child primarily for sexual purposes. As used in the [Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography](#).

Child Protection is part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm. As taken from the Department for Education's [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

Contact Child Sexual Abuse describes when an abuser makes physical contact with a child and can include assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing.

Extra-Familial Harms, or threats, are threats and/or vulnerability to abuse or exploitation from outside a child's family. These threats might arise at school and other educational establishments, from within peer groups, or from within the wider community and/or online. They can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats, including: exploitation by criminal gangs and organised crime groups such as county lines; trafficking; online abuse; sexual exploitation; and the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation. As set out in the Department for Education's [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

Grooming is when someone builds a relationship, trust and emotional connection with a child or young person so they can manipulate, exploit and abuse them. Groomers may also build a relationship with the young person's family or friends to make them seem trustworthy or authoritative. Children and young people can be groomed online, in person or both – by a stranger or someone they know. As set out by the [NSPCC](#).

Harmful Sexual Behaviour is understood as sexual behaviours expressed by children under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards themselves or others, and can in some cases be abusive (Derived from Hackett, 2014). Children's sexual behaviour exists on a wide continuum and when a child's sexual behaviour is problematic, abusive or violent, this can be developmentally damaging for the child displaying the behaviour and victimising others. Harmful sexual behaviours can take place both offline and online and, in some cases, may be classified as peer-on-peer abuse. Harmful sexual behaviours in children may also be a symptom of either their own abuse or exposure to abusive practices and/or materials.

Intra-Familial Harms, or abuse, refers to acts that occur within a family environment. Perpetrators may or may not be related to the child. The key consideration is whether the abuser feels like family from the child's point of view. Taken from the Centre of Expertise's [Key messages from research on intra-familial child sexual abuse](#).

Indecent Imagery of Children relates to photographs or 'pseudo' photographs of children. A pseudo-photograph is an image made by computer-graphics or otherwise which appears to be a photograph. This can include photos, videos, tracings and derivatives of a photograph or data that can be converted into a photograph. Whilst 'indecent' is not defined in legislation, it can include penetrative and non-penetrative sexual activity, as set out in [Indecent images of children: guidance for young people](#).

Modern Slavery includes human trafficking, slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour for the purpose of exploitation. Trafficking is defined within Article 4 of the Council of Europe Convention Against Trafficking in Human Beings. However, for the purposes of trafficking, in the case of a child there is no requirement to meet the 'means' component within that definition as a child is not able to give informed consent. Therefore, any child who is recruited, transported, transferred, harboured or received for the purposes of exploitation is considered to be a trafficking victim, whether or not they have been forced or deceived. As

taken from the Department for Education's [Care of unaccompanied migrant children and child victims of modern slavery](#) guidance.

Online Child Sexual Abuse is when child sex offenders use the internet to view and share Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), groom children online, and/or live stream the sexual abuse of children. As taken from the [Online Harms White Paper](#).

Peer-on-Peer Abuse occurs when a child is exploited or harmed by a peer of a similar age. This is generally referred to as peer-on-peer abuse and can take many forms. This can include (but is not limited to): abuse within intimate partner relationships; bullying (including cyberbullying); sexual violence and sexual harassment; physical abuse such as hitting, kicking, shaking, biting, hair pulling, or otherwise causing physical harm; sexting and initiation/hazing type violence and rituals. As taken from the Department for Education's [Keeping children safe in education](#) guidance.

Safeguarding is the action that is taken to protect children from maltreatment. This also includes preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development; ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. As taken from the Department for Education's [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

Safeguarding Partners are defined as: (a) the local authority; (b) a clinical commissioning group for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area; and (c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area. As defined under the Children Act 2004 (as amended by the Children and Social Work Act, 2017) and referred to in the Department for Education's [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#).

Sharing nudes and semi-nudes meaning the sending or posting of nude or semi-nude images, videos or live streams by young people under the age of 18 online. This could be via social media, gaming platforms, chat apps or forums. It could also involve sharing between devices via services like Apple's AirDrop which works offline. As set out in the UK Council for Internet Safety's [Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: advice for education settings working with children and young people](#).

Transnational Child Sex Offenders refer to those UK nationals and residents who travel from and sexually abuse and exploit children overseas. As taken from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse's [Children Outside the United Kingdom Investigation Report](#).

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