

South Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee



Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Strategy 2021 - 2024

Working together to keep children safe

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Strategy for tackling Child Sexual Exploitation in South Lanarkshire (2021-24)

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FOREWORD

THE CHAIR OF SOUTH LANARKSHIRE CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE

As Independent Chair of South Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee (SLCPC), I am pleased to present, the SLCPC – Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy (2021-2024) that marks one of many developments by the Child Protection Committee and its associated Task groups during challenging times.

Child Protection is a complex and often challenging area of business. The strong commitment, leadership and direction of the Chief Officers (Public Protection) Group, the support of members of SLCPC and the associated multi-agency SLCPC Task Groups ensure we can continue to keep children and young people safe.

Continuous improvement remains the focus of all our work. We routinely review and update multi-agency policies, procedures and guidance and continue to support practitioners and managers across the multi-agency workforce to carry out best practice in child protection work including learning from Initial and Significant Case Reviews. Listening to children and young people is at the heart of our vision to keep children safe. Our consistent approach to high level practice improvements assists us identify areas to be strengthened ensuring key outcomes are met or further developed. You can view the SLCPC Annual Report [here](#):

We offer this updated strategy to reflect current activity for and by the SLCPC – CSE & Online Safety Task Group. The report evidences our key achievements, builds on good practice and outlines areas for improvement. It considers how priorities and planned developments are being taken forward to ensure that the needs of children and young people at risk of harm from Child Sexual Exploitation in South Lanarkshire are met.

As Chair, the professionalism, sensitivity, dedication and diligence of partners in keeping children safe in South Lanarkshire has to be commended, particularly so during a global public health emergency.

Safaa Baxter

Independent Chair

South Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee

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1. Introduction

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a complex crime which happens in person or online or a combination of both. It can affect girls and boys from any background or community. Perpetrators are often well organised and use sophisticated tactics to manipulate children and young people and evade detection. Young people may not understand the exploitative nature of the experience until months or even years later which makes identification of victims more difficult. We know that young people who are sexually exploited are sometimes viewed negatively and that they are not always recognised as victims of abuse. We extend our thanks to the young people of South Lanarkshire who have offered extensive insight into the nature of CSE and how to progress our work in this area.

As highlighted in the national [Child Protection Improvement Programme](#), Scotland acknowledges the need to protect those at risk of, or affected by Child Sexual Exploitation. The subsequent national action plan to Prevent and Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation, progressed from 2016-2020, brought together a range of organisations, professionals and invested parties across multi-agency workforces in taking forward a set of actions to improve the child protection landscape and create a hostile place for perpetrators.

1.1 What is Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)?

As noted in the national definition below, CSE is a form of child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse encompasses ‘any act that involves the child in any activity for the sexual gratification of another’ (National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland). CSE clearly falls within this, and like any other form of sexual abuse can include both contact and non-contact sexual activity, in person or via virtual means.

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse in which a person(s), of any age takes advantage of a power imbalance to force or entice a child into engaging in sexual activity **in return for something** received by the child and/or those perpetrating or facilitating the abuse. As with other forms of child sexual abuse, the presence of perceived consent does not undermine the abusive nature of the act.

(National CSE Action Plan, 2017)

Children and young people need information to help strengthen their understanding of the risks of being exploited and how to make safe choices. Parents and carers need information about how to talk to their children and how to recognise the signs that their child may be at risk. Practitioners must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognise sexual

exploitation and respond appropriately. This must be accompanied by work to detect, disrupt and prosecute perpetrators and reduce re-offending.

As managers and practitioners, we must remember that child sexual exploitation is child abuse and child protection procedures must always apply.

Any child under the age of 18 can experience CSE. While younger children can also experience CSE, this form of abuse is most frequently documented amongst those of a post-primary age, with the average age at which concerns are first identified being 12-15 years of age. Most identified cases of CSE relate to young females. Young males also experience CSE, although their abuse can more often be overlooked. The same identification challenges can be observed in relation to black and minority ethnic children, disabled children and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex.

The key factor that distinguishes cases of CSE from other forms of sexual abuse is the additional requirement for some form of exchange; the fact that the child and/or someone else receive something in return for the sexual activity:

(a) Where the gain is on the part of the child, this can take the form of tangible or intangible rewards (for example: money, drugs, alcohol, status, protection or perceived receipt of love or affection). Fear of what might happen if they do not comply can also be a significant influencing factor; in such situations the 'gain' for the child could be prevention of something negative, for example a child who engages in sexual activity in order to avoid harm to other friends or family.

PRACTICE NOTE: *It is important to note that CSE is not just about the 'physical' reward but also psychological reward experienced. It is therefore important that professionals look beyond the tangible things they can see to understand the emotional impact too.*

(b) Where the gain is solely on the part of the perpetrator/facilitator, it must be something more than sexual gratification to fall within the sub-category of CSE. This could be money, other financial advantage (reduced cost drugs/alcohol or discharge of a debt for example), status or power.

PRACTICE NOTE: *Status and power come in many forms. To the young person this may mean someone has status within their own community or group, and as part of the hierarchy of that community or group has greater control over them. In relation to power this can mean influencing others to behave in a certain way whether they want to or not.*

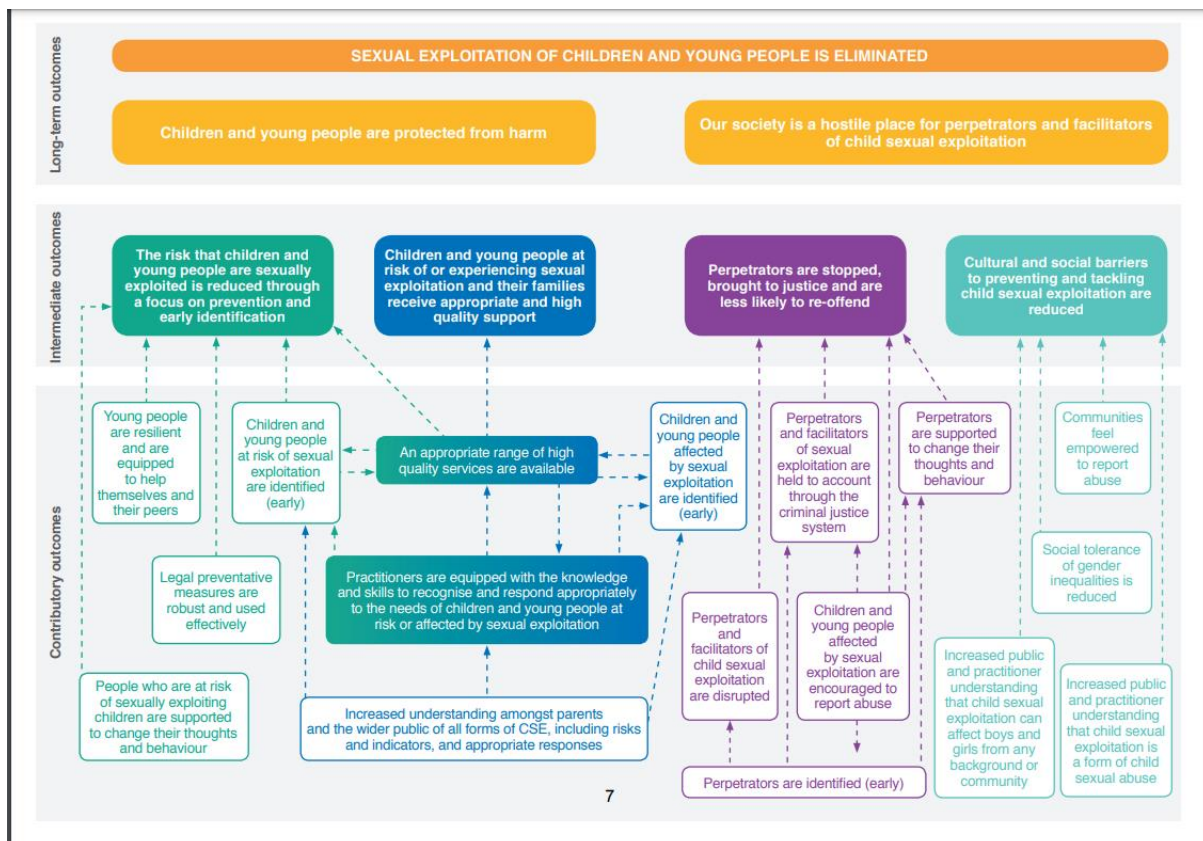
1.2 National Context

The Scottish Government established the Child Protection Improvement Programme (CPIP) in 2017, overseen by the National Child Protection Leadership Group, to ensure that our child protection system continues to learn and respond effectively to new and emerging issues. In addition to the CPIP work-streams on neglect, internet safety, child trafficking, leadership and workforce development, joint inspections, data and evidence and the Children's Hearings System, a strong emphasis was placed on action to specifically tackle Child Sexual Exploitation.

In 2014 the Scottish Government published [Scotland's first national action plan to prevent child sexual exploitation](#) that initially set out actions to be taken across government, statutory and the third sector to strengthen Scotland's response to this type of child abuse. This included 44 actions.

In recognition of the complexity of the issue of CSE and the need for national action to drive forward work to address CSE, the Scottish Government worked closely with partners to develop the National Action Plan to Prevent and Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation. The Government convened a National Child Sexual Exploitation Working Group to determine the necessary actions within the Action Plan and to oversee the delivery and implementation of these actions. South Lanarkshire were represented on that group. A first [update to the action plan](#) was published in March 2016. Progress against many of the actions set out was achieved or strengthened, as highlighted in the following annual reports:

- 2015: [National action plan to tackle child sexual exploitation: Progress report 2015-2016](#)
- 2016: [National action plan to tackle child sexual exploitation: Progress report 2016-2017](#)
- 2017: [National action plan to tackle child sexual exploitation: progress report 2017-2018](#)



Source: [National CSE Action Plan \(2016\)](#)

The work of the National CSE Action Group concluded when the [Final Delivery Report - National Action Plan to Prevent and Tackle Child Sexual Exploitation \(2020\)](#) was published. The momentum set during this extensive period of activity will continue at local level across Scotland.

1.3 Local Context

The sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and young people is a terrible crime and injustice. Child sexual exploitation (CSE) is a complex issue with children being exposed to a wide range of crimes, causing a devastating impact on children and everyone in their lives. The effects of CSE cannot be underestimated.

The 2016 National CSE Action Plan brought together a range of organisations, professionals and invested parties, in taking forward an ambitious set of actions to improve the child protection landscape and create a hostile place for perpetrators. The Plan was ambitious in its aim - to make Scotland "a place where sexual exploitation of children and young people is eliminated - a Scotland where children and young people are protected from harm and a society that is a hostile place for perpetrators and facilitators of child sexual exploitation".

The South Lanarkshire CPC acknowledged that children and young people deserve nothing less than everyone striving together towards this aim. Since its publication it has established the SLCPC - CSE & Online Safety Task Group with multi-agency representation who have developed and delivered on its own ambitious action plan. It has evolved considerably since it first established in 2016/2017 and continues to take forward national work at local level.

Most recently it has revisited its action plan to take cognisance of the [Final - National CSE Delivery Report \(2020\)](#) which not only has set out the range of activity which has taken place over the last three years but the wealth of achievements that have been delivered so far, alongside what still needs to be done.

The SLCPC - CSE & Online Safety Task Group are clear that a continued focus is needed on tackling the sexual abuse of children and that we all need to work together to safeguard victims, bring offenders to justice and help children and young people stay safe.

South Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee also acknowledges that CSE can be perpetrated by males or females, from any ethnicity, operating as individuals, informal networks or organised groups. Whilst most of our focus has tended to be on adults abusing children through CSE, we are increasingly learning about peer on peer forms of CSE and the risk that children can face within their own social settings. Within this, we are also observing an overlap between the traditionally distinct roles of victim and perpetrator. We have noted and responded to the increasing links between child sexual exploitation and social media platforms. The broader links to criminal exploitation is recognised across the UK and is being further explored. We routinely report our progress to South Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee and seek advice and guidance in progressing matters to improve outcomes. We always aim to work in a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely) way.

2. What are we trying to achieve?

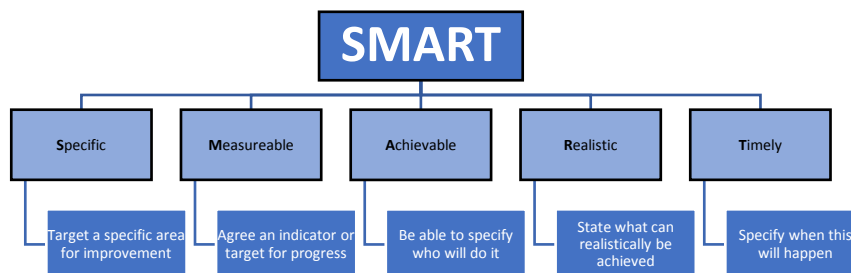
2.1 Vision

'All children and young people in Lanarkshire have the right to be cared for and protected from abuse and harm in a safe environment in which their rights are respected. All agencies will work together in a collaborative way to promote the safety of children and young people in Lanarkshire.'

As noted our vision is of a safe South Lanarkshire, where all our children and young people can flourish and reach their full potential free from abuse and harm. No child or young person should be exposed to CSE in any form (online or face to face) or have to live with the impact of it. Our aim is to prevent children and young people within South Lanarkshire from becoming victims of CSE and to prevent locations being used to recruit, groom and abuse children and young people.

2.2 SMART Outcomes

Practitioners and managers across the multi-agency workforce must listen carefully to what partners, children, young people and their families have to say. They should regularly review and analyse their findings and ensure views are taken into account. The multi-agency workforce can be supported by [SLCPC - SMART Outcomes: Working with Children & Young People Guidance \(2018\)](#). Strategic managers should refer to the SLCPC Self Evaluation Strategy for more details. As part of the planning process to improve outcomes, practitioners and managers should regularly record changes as they occur, hold comprehensive chronologies while remembering to always work SMART in achieving outcomes for children and young people as shown;



3. Where are we now?

3.1 Improving Awareness of CSE

In improving awareness, South Lanarkshire CPC has existing single and multi-agency procedures, guidance and training in place to promote, support and safeguard children and young people's wellbeing. Activity within South Lanarkshire to raise awareness and increase knowledge in preventing and tackling all forms of CSE and in doing so we;

- (a) Highlight national CSE campaigns using social media platform including National CSE Day held annually in March,
- (b) Developed and distributed Public information leaflets targeting children, young people, parents/carers, licensed premises, private hire / taxi firms and hotel accommodation throughout South Lanarkshire and available [here](#):
- (c) Hold regular awareness raising campaigns and consultations in schools and in the community,
- (d) Working directly with children, young people and their families affected by CSE.

Providing an appropriate response to CSE requires the combined efforts and skills of a protective network for children and young people and depends heavily on a multi-agency

response. Tackling child sexual exploitation means managing high levels of risk – including professional risk and this is best managed through shared responsibility with each agency playing its part and supporting the others. Having a high level of multi-agency awareness of the size and scale of CSE in our area is a considerable challenge both here and across Scotland. It remains key priority in getting it right.

South Lanarkshire Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy (2021-2023) mirrors those 4 specific areas set out in the [Final - National CSE Delivery Report \(2020\)](#). Furthermore, to support the delivery of the National report at local level in South Lanarkshire, our CSE Strategy demonstrates a collective commitment from all partners who represent South Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee to improve awareness in a number of ways.

3.2 Policy & Practice Framework

In line with national and local expectation through a number of child protection policy frameworks relating to CSE and Child Protection, we have developed SLPCPC – Multi Agency Child Sexual Exploitation [Guidance](#) for Practitioners and Managers (2018) and offered extensive multi-agency training opportunities to understand and respond to CSE. We have created access to comprehensive resources for the multi-agency workforce from [CELCIS - CSE Knowledge Bank](#) and associated Hub.

Our work reflects the requirements of the [Quality Framework for Children and Young People in need of Care and Protection \(2019\)](#) and in particular the following quality indicators;

Quality Indicator 5.1: Recognition and response to initial concerns

Quality Indicator 5.2: Assessing Risk and need and;

Quality Indicator 5.3: Care planning, managing risk and effective intervention.

We have created revised management information systems within single and multi-agencies settings and are working together to improve how CSE referrals are managed from a data perspective. We have begun to collect both qualitative and quantitative data using the new National Data Set for CPC's in Scotland. We will report on CSE information as robust data becomes available. CSE should be seen recorded / considered under current CP procedures.

To support this we have agreed and delivered awareness raising and prevention education programmes to equip children and young people with the skills they need to make safe and healthy choices and avoid high risk situations within and across operational services. We have worked directly with children and young people affected by CSE in South Lanarkshire to develop awareness raising materials targeted at young people.

We continue to refer to the National CSE Action Plan (Final Report) 2020 and the National Online Safety Action Plan (2017) and continue to offer advice and support via social media platforms, so children and young people know who they can also turn to if they are worried, need advice or support in relation to CSE.

3.3 Prevention

Child Sexual Exploitation poses a risk to all our children and young and we want to stop any instance of Child Sexual Exploitation happening in the first place. To prevent Child Sexual Exploitation as effectively as we can, we must do our best to understand as much about it as possible; the scale, nature, locus, victims and perpetrators of it, nationally but also locally.

South Lanarkshire Council is the 5th largest Scottish local authority in Scotland. It is a diverse community spread over a large area from highly populated to rural locations. Neither act as a barrier or deterrent to those who exploit and abuse our children and young people. The understanding of the prevalence of CSE continues to grow. South Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee CSE and Online Safety Task Group is working to strengthen how we can routinely review the nature and scale of CSE within South Lanarkshire. Public events and high levels of information distribution are key to keeping communities informed.

We are supported by our partners from Police Scotland, Social Work Resources, NHS Lanarkshire, Education Resources, Housing Resources, SCRA, Procurator Fiscal Service, Scottish Fire & Rescue, South Lanarkshire Leisure Services and the Third Sector in keeping children safe from harm, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

4. Our Priorities

4.1 Priority Actions

We work together to ensure we have a direct impact on the lives of those affected by CSE by creating actions that can directly or indirectly change outcomes for those children and young people most at risk. In doing so we set ambitious priorities based on our action plan that relates to;

- **Priority Action 1** – Partners share a coherent vision to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people at risk of or affected by CSE. Our leaders collaborate to ensure a clear understanding of the local and national context in which CSE exists and provide appropriate supports.
- **Priority Action 2** – We have strengthened the existing multi-agency operational and strategic arrangements to ensure that frontline staff in key agencies understand the risk indicators in relation to CSE and can refer to effective policies, procedures and training in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation.

- **Priority Action 3** – The SLCPC continues to raise local awareness about child sexual exploitation in a number of creative ways including online campaigns, to engage with all sections of our local community and increase the numbers of people that are alert to the threats of CSE and are able to take appropriate action to safeguard young people and / or disrupt perpetrators.
- **Priority Action 4** – Our children, young people and families across South Lanarkshire have access to information, available resources and supports about Child Sexual Exploitation and Online Safety.
- **Priority Action 5** – We use evidence gathered through self-evaluation to support our outcomes and to best meet the needs of those we work with.

4.2 Governance

Our leaders across the multi-agency workforce give continued commitment to prioritising the care and protection of children and young people in South Lanarkshire by supporting the work of the SLCPC. Partners maintain high levels of quality and promote continuous improvement and excellence in child protection work.

The SLCPC – CSE & Online Safety Task Group meets quarterly and reports directly to the South Lanarkshire Child Protection Committee, supported by the Lead officer Child Protection, and to the Chief Officers Group (Public Protection) as appropriate.

For further information about CSE in South Lanarkshire please send your enquiry to:
PublicProtectionOffice@SouthLanarkshire.gov.uk