

Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) was established in 2017 to increase understanding of child sexual abuse amongst practitioners, strategic leads and policy makers, and to improve approaches to tackling it.

Representatives from the CSA Centre will join today's meeting to outline findings from their recent "scale and nature of CSA" report and provide information on the Centre's current work to support councils and their partners.

Recommendation

Members are recommended to provide feedback on challenges for councils in responding to child sexual abuse and any additional issues arising from the presentation.

Action

Officers will take action as required arising from the discussion.

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Background

1. The Government published its [Tackling Child Exploitation report](#) in 2015 in response to significant concerns about delays in responding to child sexual abuse (CSA). In this report, the Government committed to establishing a national centre of expertise to identify and share high quality evidence on what works to tackle CSA, including identifying and addressing gaps in evidence and supporting professionals.
2. The Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) launched in 2017. It is funded by the Home Office and hosted by Barnardo's, which provides back office support. The Centre works with key partners from academic institutions, councils, health, education, police and the voluntary sector. It's work, however, is independent and intended to both inform our responses to CSA and challenge any barriers, assumptions or ways of working that prevent improvements to our understanding and approach to CSA.
3. The CSA Centre has a steering group and an advisory group to support its work. The steering group is made up of representatives of government departments, including the Home Office, Department for Education, Department of Health and Social Care and the Crown Prosecution Service, to ensure the Centre's work reflects cross-government priorities and opportunities, and is fed into national policy development. The advisory board provides strategic direction and expert advice to inform, shape and share the CSA Centre's work, and includes representatives of academic institutions, councils, charities, the police and health. The LGA is represented on the advisory board.

Issues for discussion

4. The CSA Centre will outline some of their key areas of work, including its latest "[scale and nature of CSA](#)" report, and is keen to hear feedback from the Board on key issues for councils.
5. This report, published in June 2021, finds that far more children experience sexual abuse than are currently being protected, and the latest data suggests the gap between recorded experiences and experiences of abuse could be widening. In 2019/20, England saw the largest drop in child protection plans for sexual abuse in 18 years – and following eight years of increased recording of child sexual abuse offences by police, there was a levelling off in 2019/20, with 87,992 identifiable CSA offences recorded.
6. The CSA Centre has estimated that at least 15% of girls and 5% of boys experience child sexual abuse before the age of 16. The majority of child sexual abuse is hidden;

never reported or uncovered by an official agency. Sadly, while current research and administrative data reveals some trends, it also leaves many questions.

7. Members will be aware of a range of national and local issues that link to a need to ensure councils and their partners have the knowledge, skills and understanding to effectively respond to CSA, including Ofsted's [review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges](#), the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) which concludes this year and the publication of the Government's [Tackling Child Sexual Abuse strategy](#).

Implications for Wales

8. The CSA Centre operates across England and Wales, including significant schemes of work with Welsh local authorities.

Financial Implications

9. None

Next steps

10. Officers will use the discussion to inform future work in this area and ongoing engagement with the CSA Centre.