

Introduction

This Child Sexual Abuse Strategy sets out how the Barking and Dagenham multi-agency partnership will prevent, and improve the response to, child sexual abuse over the next three years. Every child has the right to grow up free from sexual abuse. As a safeguarding partnership, we will continue to work with determination and compassion, to ensure child sexual abuse is no longer hidden, ignored, or misunderstood. We want children to consistently be heard, protected, and supported, with perpetrators disrupted and held to account. Our core vision is: “Every child safe, every voice heard, every reality faced”.

What we know

The strategy is driven by a detailed needs assessment that draws on national and local research, data, insights and learning. This needs assessment tells us that child sexual abuse has a much higher prevalence rate than we know about and that for victims and survivors, the impact of this abuse is devastating and can have long term effects. Staff across organisations need to be equipped with the skills, knowledge and confidence to identify and respond to child sexual abuse to tackle this, working in partnership to support victims and families and to hold perpetrators to account.

The response so far

The strategy builds on work carried out over the last six years with the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse to improve the response to child sexual abuse. This has included:

- Partnership training and the sharing of best practice tools and resources via the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse
- The development of Child Sexual Abuse Practice Leads in children’s care and support, who support best practice in the identification and response to abuse.
- The provision of holistic and child-centred support for children affected by sexual abuse through the Sunrise Hub – a multidisciplinary service offering medical assessments, emotional support, and therapeutic interventions.
- Collaborating with the NSPCC on a two-year pilot focused on supporting families affected by sibling sexual abuse.
- Ongoing work to prevent offending and reoffending, including via the Building Choices accredited programme.

The strategy

Overall, the strategy is made up of five partnership commitments in relation to child sexual abuse: Notice and name, learn and lead, protect and support, hear and believe and disrupt and hold to account. The action plan that accompanies this strategy seeks to fulfil these commitments through seven strategic aims, summarised on the next page. We will continue to work closely with the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse to carry out the commitments and actions in this strategy. This strategy will be overseen by the Child Sexual Abuse Safeguarding Partnership Delivery Group, reporting to the Barking and Dagenham Safeguarding Children Partnership Board.

Our strategic aims	Summary of key actions
1. To educate the community so they understand child sexual abuse in all its forms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To carry out awareness raising activity with children, parents, carers and communities. - To work more closely with the voluntary and community sector.
2. To develop a skilled, confident, trauma-informed workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To provide training to staff to identify and respond to child sexual abuse. - To improve practice through the support of CSA Practice Leads. - Through this, improve the response to harmful sexual behaviour, and improve child-centred, culturally competent practice.
3. For safeguarding partners to work more effectively together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To roll out tools that support CSA best practice in identifying CSA, risk assessments, safety planning and supervision. - To improve how feedback from children and families is gathered and acted on.
4. For children to receive the medical, emotional and therapeutic support they need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To learn from the Stepping Stones NSPCC pilot to improve the response to sibling sexual harm - To review how children’s mental health needs are assessed and responded to. - To further strengthen joint work with the Sunrise Hub.
5. To achieve survivor-centred justice for children by identifying, disrupting and prosecuting perpetrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To more consistently include social workers in best evidence interviews with children. - To strengthen police quality assurance activity and operational capacity.
6. To ensure child-centred senior leadership, accountability and oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To develop a partnership performance dashboard in relation to CSA - To continue to learn lessons from multi-agency audits, reviews, feedback and other insights.
7. To support staff wellbeing in relation to working with children and perpetrators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To provide trauma informed supervision and wellbeing support to staff.

To measure success, we will look at:

How much has been done to carry out agreed actions:

- Activity to raise awareness of child sexual abuse.
- How many staff have been trained and supported with practice.
- How many are children open to children’s social care where child sexual abuse is a concern.
- How many children are in contact with the Sunrise Hub and other key support services.
- How many police investigations are open in relation to child sexual abuse.

How well activity has been carried out, by looking at:

- The timeliness and quality of the response to CSA from services.
- The protected characteristics of children and perpetrators in contact with services.
- Feedback from staff, residents, partners and children and families with lived experience.
- Research and insights from national and local reviews.

What difference this made, by looking at the extent to which:

- More child sexual abuse is identified.
- The response has improved in relation to harmful sexual behaviour, and to sibling sexual harm.
- Barriers and inequality in experiences and outcomes are being addressed.
- Children and families are getting good quality, timely support, including medical, emotional and therapeutic support.
- Perpetrators are convicted, and do not reoffend.
- Children are safer as a result.