

Child Sexual Abuse **STRATEGY**

2025 - 2028



North East Lincolnshire
Safeguarding Children's Partnership

The purpose of the Strategy

This Child Sexual Abuse Strategy has been developed in partnership with Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) member agencies to provide families, communities, professionals, and decision makers with an understanding of Child Sexual Abuse. It also sets out a plan to meet children's and family's needs in the context of Child Sexual Abuse.

This strategy has been developed considering local data compared with national data of Child Sexual Abuse, as only by knowing the nature and scale of the problem locally, can all partners work together to address and prevent all types of Child Sexual Abuse. The local data we hold as part of the SCP dashboard is critical to understanding the local picture. This data will help us identify gaps in service provision and will support all partners to reduce the risk of and address Child Sexual Abuse.

The Safeguarding Practice Thematic Strategic Group is responsible for the embedding of the Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, through the strategic delivery plan, which will undertake all operational aspects of work within the strategy. All involved partner agencies are responsible for contributing to the delivery of the strategy.

A multi-agency strategic plan for *preventing, identifying, and responding* to Child Sexual Abuse.

The vision of the Child Sexual Abuse strategy.

“We believe that Child Sexual Abuse is preventable, not inevitable.”

**The North East Lincolnshire
Mission Statement for the**

Child Sexual Abuse Strategy “To reduce the risk of and prevent children and young people from experiencing Child Sexual Abuse and to intervene at the earliest possible stage to tackle its causes and reduce the impact on children when it happens.”

Defining Child Sexual Abuse

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 defines sexual abuse as behaviour which:

'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 within the family environment and outside of the home.
- 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.'
- Sexual abuse often occurs in conjunction with the other categories of child abuse, especially emotional abuse in order to maintain control and secrecy.

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/practice-resources/signs-and-indicators/>

Why is a strategy needed?

The Local and National Context

The North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Partnership have identified that local arrangements to recognise, identify, assess, and respond to all types of sexual abuse requires further strengthening to improve practice in this area.

Local Context

The need for the development of a Child Sexual Abuse Strategy was identified by the NEL SCP as a priority in December 2023. This was based on the previous lack of a strategy and identified gaps in data, training and learning from local and national safeguarding reviews. As a result the CSA strategy was developed and published in June 2024. Since this time progress made has included: the development and ongoing delivery of a strategic plan, development of CSA data and provision of CSA training and risk assessment tool. The CSA strategy and delivery plan have been reviewed in May 2025, being informed and amended as a result of the child safeguarding practice review panel's document: I wanted them all to notice November 2024.

National Context

It has been estimated that 500,000 children and young people were sexually abused in the UK in 2019. 15% of girls and 5% of boys experience some form of sexual abuse before the age of 16. **The National Crime Agency estimated between 350,000 - 850,000 individuals in the UK pose a sexual threat to children and young people.** Most children struggle to disclose this abuse, with most disclosures coming years after the abuse, if at all. The impact on the child can include unresolved trauma, severe physical and mental health difficulties, low educational attainment, and reduced life opportunities. Families, communities, and professionals should find the system easy to navigate and services easy to access, which demonstrates a need for this strategy. More work is needed to understand the best way to reduce the risk of and respond to Child Sexual Abuse and how this should be tailored to different contexts, individuals, and environments in each community.

National Data tells us that more children and young people experience Child Sexual Abuse than services are currently aware of. The diagram on page 4 shows the scale of Child Sexual Abuse compared with agencies identification of it, evidencing that we are only identifying "the tip of the Iceberg" when it comes to the prevalence of the issue.

Figure 1. The scale of child sexual abuse compared with agencies' identification of it



Sources: Home Office (2022a); Department for Education (2022a); Welsh Government (2022b); Radford et al (2011); Office for National Statistics (2022a). Numbers rounded to the nearest hundred/thousand. * Includes assessments identifying risk of child sexual exploitation.

Learning from Safeguarding Reviews

Summary of risk factors and learning for improved practice around Child Sexual Abuse.

Published Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews suggest that professionals are sometimes slow to identify sexual abuse as an explanation for a child's behaviour or medical presentation, particularly when other explanations are offered.

The learning highlights the importance of:

- professionals' ability to recognise and respond to sexual abuse
- displaying **professional curiosity** and challenge with families, carers, and other agencies
- keeping the child at the centre of practitioners' work.

This briefing focuses on Child Sexual Abuse committed by adults. [NSPCC Child Sexual Abuse: learning from case reviews](#)

Learning

For information on harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) which is displayed by children and young people, read the NSPCC HSB learning from case review briefing. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/learning-from-case-reviews/harmful-sexual-behaviour>

Learning from The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, November 2024.

Overwhelmingly, practitioners are relying on children to verbally report their abuse before taking action, which has particular implications for pre-verbal and non-verbal children. Furthermore, children are not being given opportunities to communicate what is happening to them, and are sometimes not believed when they do tell

[The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel - I wanted them all to notice](#)

Anyone can experience Sexual Abuse

Healthy relationships support healthy sexual development. The earliest relationship that most children have is with their parent or carer. Information and education on the importance of a secure relationship/attachment should be available for every new parent and carer. Some parents and carers will find this more of a challenge due to previous adverse childhood experiences.

[What Are ACEs? And How Do They Relate to Toxic Stress? \(harvard.edu\)](https://www.harvard.edu/developingchild/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/)

Evidence shows that when a child has a **secure relationship/attachment** with their parent/carer and when they have fewer Adverse Childhood Experiences or have therapeutic support to help make sense of their Adverse Childhood Experiences, the child can make and sustain more healthy relationships/attachments, therefore reducing a child or young person's vulnerability to sexual harm/abuse. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/serve-and-return/>

Parents and carers are often the first source of information for children when it comes to learning about their bodies, and sex. Due to their close relationship and the influence, they have on their children's lives, parents and carers should play a key role in Child Sexual Abuse prevention. (Wurtele and Kenny,2010). To effectively prevent Child Sexual Abuse **parents and carers need to have knowledge of healthy sexual development** and be able to recognise indicators of Child Sexual Abuse and how to respond.

<https://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/sexual-abuse-learning-programme.htm>

Healthy developmental sexual activity encompasses those actions which are to be expected from children and young people as they move from infancy through to adulthood, gaining an understanding of their physical emotional and behavioural relationships. **Child development** incorporates physical, emotional, cognitive, and sexual development. Children and young people develop sexually just as they do emotionally, mentally, cognitively, and physically. The range of normative age-appropriate sexual behaviour changes as a child or young person grows and develops. <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/leaflets/parent-leaflets>

Most sexual behaviour displayed by children and young people will sit within a normative development range. **Parents, educators, community, and society** (media coverage and promotion of equality) have a role in prompting this normative development. The challenge for carers, professionals and the community are to identify sexual behaviours that fall outside this range and then assist in seeking the right support or help for the young person with those problematic behaviours. [Harmful Sexualised Behaviour Practice](#)

[Guidance & Procedure \(trixonline.co.uk\)](https://trixonline.co.uk). [Harmful sexual behaviour framework: an evidence-informed operational framework for children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours \(nspcc.org.uk\)](https://nspcc.org.uk)

Why do we need to change the way we work?

Today's children and young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world and living their lives seamlessly on and offline. This presents many positive and exciting opportunities, but also challenges and risks. In this environment, children and young people need to know how to be safe and healthy, and how to manage their academic, personal, and social lives in a positive way.

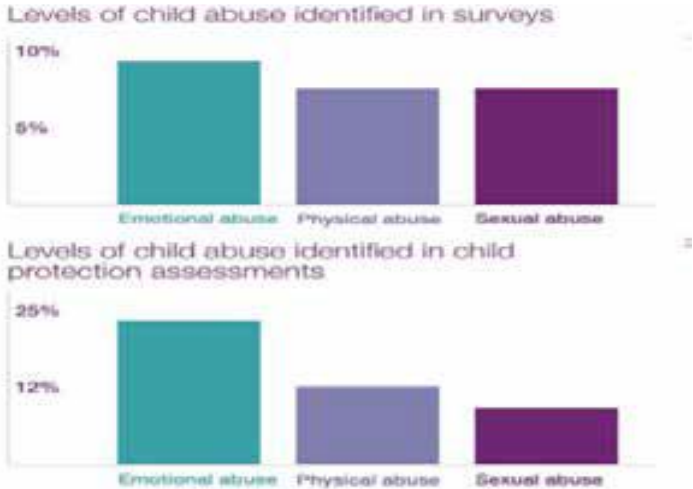
Decision makers, parents and the community need to know how to support children's healthy development including sexual development and be knowledgeable and comfortable to talk about all types of Child Sexual Abuse. It is crucial that children accessing universal services or early help and those receiving support through Child in Need or Child Protection processes, receive support at the earliest opportunity. We need to ensure that our community and the workforce have relevant knowledge and information to identify the most appropriate support at the earliest point. The Child Sexual Abuse Strategy should be read in conjunction with the North East Lincolnshire Prevention and Early Help Partnership Strategy for Children and Families, and the Neglect Strategy and The Child Exploitation Strategy.

The delivery of the strategy will include all SCP member agencies. Schools and educators are required to make relationships education compulsory in all primary schools in England and relationships and sex education compulsory in all secondary schools, as well as making health education compulsory in all state funded schools. To enable schools and educators to feel confident in the delivery of relationships and sex education, access to relevant training and support for staff is needed. (Department for Education, relationships education, relationship, and sex education (RSE) and health education – Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietor's, head teachers, principal's, senior leadership teams, and teachers).

The child centre for expertise recognises that even where a child is placed on a Child Protection Plan and there are concerns that they are being sexually abused, it is likely that a different primary category of abuse will be recorded on the plan. Further training for the workforce regarding Child Protection categories and data collection is needed in reviewing and evaluating incidents of Child Sexual Abuse.

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Research by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner (2015) found that among children who had been sexually abused according to police data, more were recorded by children’s services under the categories of neglect (32%) or emotional abuse (29%) than under sexual abuse (20%). The study found that social workers considered neglect to be a “more straightforward” designation than sexual abuse (Child Sexual Abuse in 2021/22 Trends in official data, Kairika Karsna and Paige Bromley February 2023). Please see below an Office for National Statistics (ONS) graph which identifies that the scale of Child Sexual Abuse is comparable to the scale of physical abuse and yet within Child Protection assessments (as seen in the graph below) Child Sexual Abuse is not equally recognised.



Sources: Office for National Statistics, Child abuse in England and Wales, 2020, Department for Education, Characteristics of Children in need, 2020/21

Who's at risk.

All children are at risk of being sexually abused.

Most children who are sexually abused are abused by someone they know. This could be a family member, a friend or someone who has targeted them. <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/key-messages/intra-familial-csa/>

Children who are sexually abused online could be abused by someone they know. They could also be abused by someone who commits a one-off sexually abusive act, or a stranger who builds a relationship with them (grooming).

<https://www.safernel.co.uk/abuse-neglect/sexual-harm>

[Child Sexual Exploitation \(trixonline.co.uk\)](https://www.trixonline.co.uk/child-sexual-exploitation/)

Sexual abuse can be the most secretive and difficult type of abuse for children and young people to talk about. It may be particularly difficult to talk about and disclose abuse by a sibling. Many children and young people do not recognise themselves as victims of sexual abuse - a child may not understand what is happening and may not even understand that it is wrong, especially as the perpetrator may seek to reduce the risk of speaking out by threatening them, telling them they will not be believed or holding them responsible for their own abuse.

There may be a range of signs, but any one sign does not necessarily mean that a child is being sexually abused. Curiosity should be exercised by professionals and by the community. However, the presence of several key signs would indicate the need to consider the potential for abuse and consult with others who know the child to see whether they also have concerns.

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-resources/practice-resources/signs-and-indicators/>

Plan for Preventing and Reducing Child Sexual Abuse

North East Lincolnshire seeks to reduce all types of Child Sexual Abuse including intra-familial abuse, harmful sexual behaviour, child sexual exploitation and online abuse, by working in partnership with children and families, communities, professionals, and systems.

The NEL CSA Strategy is responsible for The Child Centre for Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse response pathway should be followed when there are concerns a child is being or has been sexually abused. The Child Sexual Abuse guidance and Child Sexual Abuse Pathway should be followed by all practitioners where there is a concern or report of child sexual abuse. [Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway | CSA Centre](#)

[Multi-agency-Pathway-for-suspected-child-sexual-abuse-flowchart-May-2024.pdf \(safernel.co.uk\)](#)

The NEL SCP Child Sexual Abuse practice guidance should be followed. [Child Sexual Abuse Guidance](#)

The NEL SCP Child Sexual Abuse tool kit should be used in supporting the identification and response to Child Sexual Abuse [Helen Link to be added](#)

To be successful in reducing the risk, preventing Child Sexual Abuse from happening, and protecting children who experience abuse, we must develop a better understanding of offending. For Child Sexual Abuse to occur, Finklehor (1984) identified four pre-conditions that must be present, 1) The individual is sexually motivated to sexually harm 2) The ability to overcome personal internal inhibitors towards such sexual abuse 3) The overcoming of external barriers to committing sexual abuse e.g. parental supervision 4) The overcoming of the individual's resistance.

<https://ecsa.lucyfaithfull.org/sites/default/files/attachments/StepsTowardsPrevention.pdf>

<https://www.csacentre.org.uk/app/uploads/2023/10/New-typology-of-child-sexual-abuse-offending.pdf>

There is a separate NEL SCP Strategy for Child Sexual Exploitation which is closely aligned to the NEL SCP CSA Strategy and provides detail in respect of the local arrangements to Child Criminal Exploitation, Child Sexual Exploitation and On-line Child Sexual Exploitation.

By Working together and sharing information we plan to develop an inclusive, strength based, sustainable and evidence-based approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse. The approach will also be informed by data (identified as lacking both nationally and locally) and an understanding of trauma and its impact.

The local response will also be informed by The Government strategy “**Tackling Child Sexual Abuse**” which has an ambition to strengthen the response to all forms of Child Sexual Abuse through three key objectives:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/605c82328fa8f545dca2c643/Tackling_Child_Sexual_Abuse_Strategy_2021.pdf

1. **Tackling all forms of Child Sexual Abuse and bringing offenders to justice.**
2. **Preventing offending and reoffending.**
3. **Protecting and safeguarding children and young people and supporting all victims and survivors.**

This Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) strategy is based on the following theory of change which is key to its success.

Children & Families

Community

Professionals

Systems

Unmet Need

Children & young people may receive conflicting information around relationships, which leads them to develop unclear boundaries and expectations. Children & young people may not recognise that what is happening to them is abuse, feel unable to speak out or not have the opportunity to do so. Some parents and carers are uncomfortable talking about sexual abuse and do not know how to talk to children about healthy relationships. Some parents and carers do not recognise when to get support early enough or what to do when they have a concern about their child(ren). We need to recognise the impact on families who experience Child Sexual Abuse in all its forms and a need to support these families appropriately and intervene in a timely fashion.

There is a general feeling being uncomfortable with discussing the subject of Child Sexual Abuse which leaves us ill-informed and subject to believing myths leaving children and young people unprotected. There may be a lack of awareness about some forms of sexual abuse, its impact in communities, and how people should respond to concerns about Child Sexual Abuse. Communities may not be sufficiently supported to understand the roles they can play in preventing Child Sexual Abuse. Communities do not feel empowered, and do not have the opportunity, to fulfil their role in ensuring local areas are safe places. Lack of knowledge and training opportunities for community, professional and decision makers.

Agencies/Professionals are not aware of what data is relevant to collect to understand the need locally. Professionals may lack confidence and understanding of Child Sexual Abuse and the different types of Child Sexual Abuse, and do not feel empowered to act because they lack time, space or/and opportunity. Professionals' training may not adequately equip them to identify and respond to signs of Child Sexual Abuse or trauma in children & families. Professionals may lack confidence and understanding of how to prevent harmful sexual behaviour and do not feel empowered to act because they lack time, space or/and opportunity. Professionals many feel Uncomfortable about talking about Child Sexual Abuser and harmful sexualised behaviour.

Difficulties in coordination and partnership working between agencies which may make it hard to build and maintain an effective early intervention and prevention system. There may be a lack of capacity for a 'trauma-informed' approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse. There may be a lack of integrated support for children. and adults with concerning Sexual behaviour. Lack of consistent and comparable data. Proposed mandatory reporting, by government and understanding requirements.

What needs to happen?

Awareness raising activities to increase discussions and understanding of the importance of every day positive conversations about healthy relationships (self-esteem /assertiveness and consent) and sex and how we can all play a part in safeguarding children, in families and communities. A range of quality-assured, tailored, evidence-based healthy relationships, sex, and relationships education, which is integrated as a whole school/setting approach for 0–18-year-olds and their parents/carers. A range of activities and services to provide children, young people, and parents/carers with access to confidential support when they need it and ensure they have someone local to turn to when in distress or danger.

Campaigns, education, and support to initiate and enable community-led conversations about healthy relationships, consent, self-esteem, assertiveness. Increase the community knowledge and understanding of the various forms of Child Sexual Abuse through discussion, media using reliable information/sources. Awareness raising to help communities agree clear expectations about challenging all forms of concerning sexual behaviour locally and knowledge of where to go to for help. Advice and support for community /voluntary organisations to help them prevent Child Sexual Abuse and encourage healthy relationships.

Partners to work together to understand what relevant data we should collect, review and use. Organisations able to fill gaps in services identified. Trauma awareness training and therapeutic relationships training. Training to understand typologies of and how to identify Child Sexual Abuse - the gathering of information and data. Enhanced access to Child Sexual Abuse knowledge and information to increase the confidence of professionals in identifying Child Sexual Abuse concerns early and continuing support to explore concerns (Centre of Expertise CSA). Organisations offer time and space for training, supervision, and professional development.

Strategic support to develop an integrated approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse, based on identified gaps, including service provision, development of multi-agency commissioning arrangements, protocols, thresholds and tools. Trauma informed services to support children, young people, parents/carers, community members and professionals to take a preventative approach to child sexual abuse and to assist recovery. Influencing local partners' commissioning decisions to fund prevention services and activity in relation to preventing sexually harmful behaviour. A working group to identify, gather and review data in relation to Child Sexual Abuse. Community knowledge and professional training opportunities, including mandatory reporting.

Outcomes

Children & families feel able to discuss Child Sexual Abuse. Children and families know about healthy relationships and what Child Sexual Abuse is. Children & families know where to access support/services if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse. Children & families act if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse. Data informs us that Children, Young People and Families feel safer, have timely interventions, and have adequate support.

Community members know what Child Sexual Abuse is and recognise that. By working collectively, we can REDUCE the risk of and seek to prevent sexual abuse. Community members respond appropriately if they have concerns relating to sexual abuse about a child/family. Data informs us that Children, Young People and Families are safer in their communities.

Professionals feel confident in gathering the relevant data and know where and how and when to feed this back. Professionals who work with children are more confident in talking about, identifying, addressing, and preventing Child Sexual Abuse. Gaps in service provision are filled appropriately. Data informs us that Professionals can identify, address and prevent Child Sexual Abuse.

Sexual abuse services that are evidenced-based, accessible, tailored and preventative are available for families and children, and those with harmful sexual behaviour. Health, public services, and voluntary sector work together. in a co-ordinated, responsive, evidence-based way to help prevent Child Sexual Abuse. Better understanding of Child Sexual Abuse in the community and workforce. A consistent and comparable data set that is used to inform services and practice.

NEL CSP Strategic Delivery Plan - Our goals

(All NEL partners and stakeholders working with children and young people)

Children and Families

We will ensure that the voices of children, young people and families are heard, understood, and responded to in a sensitive and supportive way.

We will help children, young people and families in accessing information and training and support their understanding of healthy sexual development and how to promote this.

We will supply families with the relevant information and guide them to the most useful support. We recognise the impact on families affected by Child Sexual Abuse and their need for information and support at the earliest opportunity.

Community

We will, through public campaigns and education, seek to build a community which is more aware and curious about Child Sexual Abuse.

We will help the community to have access to information and training and support their understanding of healthy sexual development and how to promote this.

We will supply communities with the relevant information and guide them to the most useful support. We recognise the impact on families affected by Child Sexual Abuse and their need for information and support at the earliest opportunity.

Professionals

We will collect relevant Child Sexual Abuse data locally to ensure our finite resources are invested in the right places.

We will recognise signs and indicators of Child Sexual Abuse in families, education, and the community, across all levels of the thresholds of need.

We will support our workforce in learning about healthy relationships, appropriate childhood development, and being curious when seeing vulnerabilities in children.

We will encourage our workforce to be curious when observing or assessing signs of sexualised behaviour in children and young people to help them identify patterns of behaviour which may require additional support.

We will equip the workforce and the community to understand the different types of Child Sexual Abuse, to adequately assess and intervene and seek support for children's young people and families.

We will develop the workforce knowledge and skills around Child Sexual Abuse by understanding their professional development requirements in this area. We will research the most up to date and relevant training opportunities, making these training and development opportunities available to the North East Lincolnshire Workforce.

Systems

We will provide strategic support to develop an integrated approach to preventing Child Sexual Abuse through the CSA Strategy, Early Help Strategy, Neglect Strategy, Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy including, protocols, thresholds, and tools and the development of multi-agency commissioning arrangements.

We will ensure relevant (guided by data) Sexual abuse services that are evidenced-based, accessible, tailored and preventative are available for families and children.

We will ensure that the community, workforce, and decision makers have access to knowledge and relevant training about Child Sexual Abuse.

Measures for success

This strategy and its implementation are accountable to the North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board and all operational partners. A strategic delivery plan sets out the multi-agency actions required to enable us to deliver this strategy and will include matters in relation to training and strengthening partnerships in the area. The Strategic Delivery Plan is based on and informed by the Child Sexual Abuse Theory of change. The Strategic Delivery Plan will be subject to on-going review and challenge from the Safeguarding Children Partnership Board.

We aim to achieve the following outcomes/outputs and will measure them as described in our Strategic Delivery plan (targets/measures to be determined):

1. More children are kept safe from sexual abuse because North East Lincolnshire follows a clear, systematic, multi-agency strategic approach to responding to Child Sexual Abuse.
2. Partner agencies can access the Strategy, relevant guidance, and training to ensure that their practice is trauma informed, informed by research and evidence, and sensitive to the needs of children and families.
3. The Safeguarding Children's Partnership understands the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse in North East Lincolnshire through gathering and analysis of data and provides the relevant response/services.
4. The North East Lincolnshire safeguarding workforce is skilled, prepared, well trained and works effectively with others to reduce Child Sexual Abuse.
5. Children and families know where to access support/services if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse
6. Children and families know when and how to take action if they are concerned about Child Sexual Abuse.
7. Data informs us that children, young people, and families feel safer, receive timely interventions, and have appropriate and adequate support.

Summary & Next Steps

We know that Child Sexual Abuse can happen to anyone. We recognise the correlation of Child Sexual Abuse with Neglect, Physical Abuse (including Domestic Abuse), Emotional Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation. Therefore, this strategy aligns with the other strategies covering these types of abuse and the North East Lincolnshire Early Help Prevention Strategy, Neglect Strategy and Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy.

- We will continue to understand develop and analyse the Performance Dashboard regarding the person experiencing sexual harm, the suspected person perpetrating the sexual harm, the context of the abuse and the service response, in respect of Child Sexual Abuse and its prevalence.
- We will monitor and review what support is available in our local area and how these services can be accessed to provide children, young people and families (as well as perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse) with timely and appropriate support. This will be achieved through the Strategic Delivery Plan.
- We will commit to reducing the numbers of children, young people and families experiencing Child Sexual Abuse.
- We expect all partner agencies to read the strategy and refer to all relevant North East Lincolnshire Guidance in respect of Child Sexual Abuse.
- In North East Lincolnshire we will review research, data and National and Local learning ensuring this informs practice when working with children, families and communities. Working together to address gaps in knowledge and service provision to prevent and tackle Child Sexual Abuse in all its forms as a priority.
- We will work together to prevent CSA in a strengths-based way with children, families, and communities, which will seek to understand and respond to the individuals' lived experiences and the impact of trauma.