

**JOINT CSE REVIEW GROUP
2025 ANNUAL REPORT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. In addition to the Chair of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Telford (IITCSE), this is the third annual Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) report presenting data, analysis and trends in relation to CSE in Telford & Wrekin together with information about the activity that has taken place to safeguard those at risk. The core focus of this report is:
 - the contacts that were made to Telford & Wrekin Council's children social care Family Connect¹ because of concerns about CSE; and,
 - CSE crimes recorded by West Mercia Police and a profile of those suspected of committing these crimes.
2. Each annual report covers a financial year. Therefore, the reporting period for this report is April 2024 to March 2025. The headline findings of the report are set out below.

CSE Contacts into Family Connect

3. In 2024/25, the number of contacts into Family Connect because of concerns about CSE were very similar to the number in the 2023/24 CSE annual report. In 2024/25 there were 118 contacts about 95 children to Family Connect where risk factors associated with CSE were a concern and in 2023/24 there were 115 contacts about 94 children.
4. When assessed by a qualified social worker to identify what action and support should be taken, of the 118 CSE contacts, 50 (43%) were referred to the Council's Children Abused Through Exploitation team (CATE) and/or traditional statutory safeguarding for additional detailed assessment and allocation. This mirrors the finding from the 2023/24 report where 47% of CSE contacts into Family Connect were referred to the CATE team for further detailed assessment.
5. The CATE team provides specialist support to children and young people who are at the greatest risk of, or are, a victim of exploitation. This second assessment process is a very detailed analysis of the context of the referral and the child's family dynamics to ensure that the most appropriate support is provided to them. Those contacts into Family Connect that were not referred to the CATE team all received appropriate support informed by the level of risk. Detailed information on these outcomes can be found in paragraph 34 of the main report.
6. From the 50 contacts that were referred to CATE, 29 children were "opened" to receive appropriate support from the team. Of these 29 children, there were more children (11 rather than 6 in 2023/24) were found to be a victim of CSE and fewer children found to be at risk of becoming a victim of CSE than in the

¹ Family Connect is the first point of contact into children social services when an individual (whether member of the public or safeguarding professional) has a concern about the safety of a child.

previous reporting period (18 rather than 28 in 2023/24). Again, following this detailed assessment by CATE, where a child or young person was not opened to CATE, appropriate support was provided. Detailed Information on these outcomes can be found in paragraph 37 of the main report.

7. The profile of children and young people that have received support from the CATE service in 2024/25 was broadly comparable to the 2023/24 report profile, in terms of average age (15), the proportion that are female (87%), the ethnicity profile (89% 'White British') and the proportion that receive support for special educational needs (46%).

West Mercia Police Crime and Suspect Profile

8. West Mercia Police recorded 53 CSE incidents in 2024/25 (80 2023/24) and of these, 25 had a suspect / or suspects recorded against them with 23 individuals (45 2023/24) recorded for these cases. Over half the of CSE incidents related to online offending which predominantly involved inciting children to send indecent images of themselves in exchange for a commodity.
9. Where the police had recorded the gender of suspects, almost three quarters (74%) were male and 26% were female. The 2023/24 report found that 98% of suspects were male.
10. In terms of age, police data shows that 38% of the suspects were aged under 18, 19% aged 18 to 25 and 42% aged 26 or older. In the 23/24 report, 24% of suspects were aged under 18.
11. In cases there the police had recorded ethnicity of the suspect, 20 (87%) of the suspects were 'White' with there being one suspect (4%) who was 'Other Asian', one suspect who was 'Indian' (4%) and another suspect (4%) who was of an 'Other Mixed Background'. The 2023/24 report suspect profile found that 47% of suspects were 'White'.
12. Of the 53 offences/incidents, 2 (5%) resulted in a suspect being charged or summonsed whilst 10 are still currently under investigation. Of the 2 who were charged, both were found guilty.

INTRODUCTION

13. This report is the third annual child sexual exploitation (CSE) report presenting data and information in relation to CSE in Telford & Wrekin, and the activity taking place to respond to CSE and safeguard those at risk. Additionally, in 2023, a further report presenting the report of Tom Crowther KC, the Chair of the Independent Inquiry was presented to Telford & Wrekin Council's full Council. Being reported on a financial year, the reporting period for this report is April 2024 to March 2025.
14. In July 2022, Tom Crowther KC, the Independent Chair, of the Independent Inquiry into CSE in Telford (IITCSE) commissioned by Telford & Wrekin Council, published his report which contained 47 recommendations and 148 specific actions for several organisations, including the Council, West Mercia Police, health and West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner.
15. Recommendations 1 to 5 required the publication of an annual CSE report whilst other recommendations set out other information to be included in this report.
16. In 2023, a first annual report was published that focussed on three years' data from 2020/21 to 2022/23 to ensure a robust baseline. A second annual report was then published for the period April 2023 to March 2024.
17. In July 2024, the IITCSE chair, Tom Crowther published a 2-year review of his assessment progress against the 47 recommendations of his IITCSE Report. Of Recommendations 1 to 5 his review report commented:

'This data collection and analysis not only meets what I contemplated in Recommendation 1, it goes beyond it. In my view, the stakeholders have taken the Recommendation as a foundation and have gone further, creating a framework for data sharing and analysis which is plainly relevant not only to the direction of support and disruption resources, but also to a greater public understanding of the nature and extent of CSE within Telford. This is an extremely positive approach which shows in my view a wholehearted adoption of the spirit of the Recommendation'²

Recommendations 1 to 5: publication of CSE DATA and information from the Council, Police, health and schools

Multi-agency Safeguarding Arrangements

18. Telford & Wrekin Council, West Mercia Police and the NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board (ICB) have a statutory duty to have in place multi-agency safeguarding arrangements that ensure vulnerable children are

² [twoplusyearplusreviewplusreportplus-plus16plusjulyplus2024.pdf](#) Paragraph 109, Page 33.

protected and supported. This responsibility is discharged through the Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Partnership. Membership of the partnership includes representatives from:

- Telford & Wrekin Council including Education & Skills (representing early years, schools and colleges), Children's Safeguarding and Family Support, Licensing, and Housing
- NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin (ICB)
- Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust
- Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust
- Shropshire Community NHS Trust
- West Mercia Police
- Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service
- Probation
- Youth Justice Service
- Community & voluntary organisations.

19. Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Children Partnership works to:

- create an environment where Child Exploitation (CE), and specifically CSE, is prevented, identified, and challenged, and;
- ensure that children, young people and families whose lives are affected by CSE will receive a high level of support as well as protection, and the perpetrators are held accountable for their actions, and brought to justice.

Threshold Guidance

20. The Safeguarding Children Board has developed and adopted 'threshold guidance' to ensure that anyone who works alongside children, young people, their families and carers work together, share information and ensure that effective support is provided.
21. The guidance describes a range of different needs and the intervention that will meet that need. Consistent application of threshold for statutory intervention and early help provision is crucial in identifying and meeting the needs of families and maintaining quality of provision of support across all services.
22. This approach should ensure that all partners respond to concerns about CSE in the same way. It enables partners to understand each individual report or case, share information with partners and ensure that those who have been subject to CSE, and those at risk of CSE, are receiving the right support.
23. The document describes factors associated with CE (which includes CSE) such as:
- Running away/going missing
 - Coercion/control
 - Contacts with abusive persons and/or risky environments
 - Substance misuse
 - Education
 - Use of social media/technology

- Emotional & physical health and sexual health
- Accommodation and family relationships
- Offending/criminal activity
- Community/social isolation factors

24. The CE threshold guidance has four levels of need. For each of the above factors the guidance sets out the relevant signs and behaviours for each of these levels of risk:

Universal - a child or young person's needs are adequately met by universal services and no additional support is required.

Vulnerable - children and young people defined as needing some additional support as there are early indicators of potential exploitation. Without support, these issues may develop into more worrying concerns. An Early Help Assessment may be undertaken to identify need and the support required to be undertaken by a single agency.

Complex - the child or young person remains vulnerable to exploitation. They are potentially at risk of developing acute/ complex needs if they do not receive targeted intervention. A multi-agency response will be provided.

Acute - exploitation is known or suspected and there are urgent and immediate safeguarding concerns for the child or young person. A multi-agency response will be provided, informed by specialist assessments.

25. The threshold document sets out the concept of significant harm and how harm should be understood and managed. In the context of CSE and CE, the guidance sets out how harm outside the home should be assessed through 'contextual safeguarding'.
26. When an agency or practitioner has safeguarding concerns about a child or young person, they assess the information known to them to identify the level of risk and harm. Where the risk is assessed as 'complex' or 'acute' then this information is shared with Family Connect. As well as practitioners from partner organisations, members of the public, family and friends share safeguarding concerns with Family Connect.

Family Connect

27. Family Connect is the Safeguarding Children Board's Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (known as the MASH) comprising qualified professionals from the Council, NHS (including mental health services, hospitals and '0 to 19' services), West Mercia Police, Youth Justice, Probation, education, Wrekin Housing Group and the Local Authority Designated Officer (responsible for managing allegations against adults who work with children). They work to build a picture of a child or young person's safeguarding risk. This is developed from the information that comes directly to Family Connect and their own organisation's information systems. This picture is screened by qualified social

workers to identify what immediate action should be taken to safeguard the child or young person.

Child Abused Through Exploitation (CATE)

28. The Council's CATE team and the partnership 'CATE pathway' are a core part of the Safeguarding Children Board's response to CSE and CE more widely. Research has established that, using traditional safeguarding procedures which see children being identified as children in need or placed on a child protection plan, is not always the most effective approach to support young people at risk of / suffering from exploitation. To address this, the Council's Child Exploitation Care & Support Pathway is a process for safeguarding children underpinned by a contextual safeguarding approach to understand and respond to children and young people's experience of significant harm beyond their family and outside the family home.
29. The Council's CATE Team, alongside the local Child Exploitation Police Team from West Mercia Police, takes a central position within this pathway. For those children and young people where it is not appropriate for them to be supported solely by this pathway, they also receive support by statutory children's safeguarding services ensuring that they continue to receive specialised CATE team support.

CSE Contacts into Family Connect

30. Since publication of the 2023 baseline report changes have been made to better support those who make referrals to Family Connect with concerns about CSE to improve the quality and appropriateness of those referrals and to enhance understanding of the indicators of CSE and the threshold guidance. These actions are:
 - **Review of the CATE pathway** - since an initial review in line with IITCSE Recommendation 10, the CATE Pathway has been further reviewed. Lived experience consultees played a fundamental role in challenging the Council's processes and testing the thinking around what the documents said versus what the Council did in practice. This work has led to the production of a suite of documents which set out when a child might be supported through the CATE team. It was also updated to reflect those changes brought about by other recommendations, such as the introduction of the adulthood transition meeting (known as the post-17 transition meeting) required by IITCSE Recommendation 11.
 - **Development of 'Explore More' document** – this was coproduced between lived experience consultees and practitioners. The document which addresses the potential indicators of CSE and provides wider context around the questions that practitioners can ask when receiving details of concerns about CSE to help ensure that any decisions are based upon all relevant information available at the time of referral. The Explore More is used by a wide range of people, e.g. school professionals and health professionals to enable them, when making a referral, to better articulate factors that have led to concerns about CSE.

- **Introduction of weekly consultation sessions with the CATE team to support practitioners with concerns over CSE** – these consultation meetings were established to develop practitioners’ understanding and knowledge of CSE and the CATE pathway, to drive improvement in the quality, appropriateness and outcome of CSE referrals.
 - **Introduction of anonymous referrals through an online referral form** (IITCSE Recommendation 21) – for many different reasons, an individual may not wish to provide their personal details when making a referral to Family Connect about CSE. Recommendation 21 of the IITCSE report called for the implementation of a fully anonymous online child exploitation referral reform to Family Connect. This has been implemented (<https://webforms.telford.gov.uk/form/489>).
31. In 2024/25, there were 118 contacts about 95 children to Family Connect where CSE was reported to be a concern. This mirrors the position for 2023/24 when there were 115 contacts about 94 children to Family Connect where CSE was reported to be a concern.
 32. The ratio of “contacts to children” for each of these years is 1:2. This compares with a ratio of 1:4 for the baseline study. This lower ratio means that fewer contacts are required before a case is acted upon by Family Connect. This improvement reflects the work described above to improve the quality of contacts into Family Connect about CSE enabling a more thorough assessment to take place at an earlier stage. It is reassuring that this impact has been maintained from 2023/24 into 2024/25. The improved quality of information provided to Family Connect has enabled better-informed decision making at an early opportunity.
 33. In 2024/25, the Police made 43 contacts (37%, 37% 2023/24), the Council 33 contacts (27%, 27% 2023/24), schools/colleges 18 contacts (15%, 18% 2023/24), the NHS made 9 contacts (8%, 5% 2023/24), there were 3 anonymous referrals (3%, 4% 2023/24) and 6 from individuals (6%, 5% 2023/24) and 6 from other agencies (5%, 3% 2023/24)). As can be seen by the percentages in the brackets, this was broadly comparable to the profile for 2023/24. The proportion of contacts by the different agencies in the past two years does not represent any significant change from the baseline report.
 34. Following initial screening by qualified social workers in Family Connect, the outcomes for the 118 contacts were:
 - 48 (41%, 41% 2023/24) of contacts were referred to another agency for early help. This support is given to a family when a problem first emerges to avoid concerns escalating, with the objective to quickly improve outcomes for the child or young person. The support provided can take many forms and might include home visiting programmes, school-based programmes and mentoring schemes. For example, a school has identified concern around a child not adhering to agreed boundaries with parents, coming home late and peer group association. This case would be referred to the Council’s

Strengthening Families service for support around risks to safety and wellbeing. The Strengthening Families service will also provide support to parents.

- 19 (16%, 11% 2023/24) of CSE contacts were provided with information, advice and support. For example, a parent contacts Family Connect as they are concerned about their child's online safety and want to know how best to monitor usage and broach the issue with their child. The parent would be provided with relevant information and advice and with links to appropriate websites.
 - 50 (43%, 47% 2023/24) of the contacts met the threshold for referral to CATE and/or traditional statutory safeguarding. This happens when the child who is the subject of the contact is deemed to be at significant risk of becoming a victim of CSE. For example, the child has been contacted by adults online or in person and the content of messages indicates that the child is being targeted for grooming. In such a case, the contact is referred to CATE and/or statutory safeguarding for additional detailed assessment and allocation. This second assessment process is a very detailed analysis of the context of the referral and the child's family dynamics to ensure that the most appropriate support is provided to them.
35. Compared to the 2024 report the outcomes of CSE contacts in 2024/25 were broadly comparable. The proportion that received early help support was the same at 41%. The proportion that received information, support and advice at 16% was 5%-points greater than 2023/24 (11%), whilst the proportion that were referred to CATE and/or traditional statutory safeguarding at 43% was 4%-points lower than 2023/24. It is important to highlight that the proportion in 2024/25 that were referred to CATE was significantly higher than the baseline report (32%). That more cases in both 2023/24 and 2024/25 than in the baseline report were referred to CATE is symptomatic of improved quality to the information contained in referrals as a result of the process changes described in paragraph 18 of this report enabling practitioners to have a more holistic view of the child's circumstances.
36. From the 50 contacts that were referred to CATE and/or statutory safeguarding, 29 children were "opened" to receive appropriate support from CATE. Another 5 children were already open and receiving support from CATE and a further 8 children were already open to statutory safeguarding.
37. The outcome of the other children and young people that were referred to CATE and/or safeguarding by Family Connect following detailed assessment were:
- 2 were already open to CATE for child criminal exploitation
 - 4 following Child & Family (C&F) assessment found that CSE was not a factor. Of these:
 - 2 were referred to another agency for single agency early help support; and,
 - 2 were opened to safeguarding services.

- 2 following C&F assessment where CSE was a factor – 1 was opened to statutory safeguarding services, and the response to a second, was the provision of information and advice because the parents of the child were proactive and working to protect the child.

Children and Young People Receiving Support from CATE for CSE

38. As part of this review, detailed qualitative case analysis was undertaken by senior managers in the CATE and Safeguarding Service to identify which of the 29 children were a victim of CSE and which were at risk of becoming a victim of CSE – these are the new cases opened to CATE in 2024/25. This analysis was based upon the definition used by the Inquiry Chair to describe CSE. It found that 11 (6 2023/24) met the definition and 18 (28 2023/24) were at risk of becoming a victim of CSE.
39. The baseline report found that, across the three years, there was an average of 12 new confirmed cases of CSE each year and an average of 13 cases that were at risk of becoming a victim of CSE. In comparison in both 2024/25 and 2023/24, there were fewer (11 and 6) confirmed cases of CSE and more children and young people (18 and 28) at risk of CSE. This initial analysis suggests that children and young people at risk of CSE are being identified earlier and, with better information shared at referral, are receiving the support that they need to safeguard and support them. This will continue to be monitored with a particular focus on re-referrals.
40. The characteristics of **all** children and young people receiving safeguarding support from CATE because of CSE in 2024/25 is presented below. There are 70 children in this cohort as almost all children and young people that receive safeguarding support from CATE do so for more than 12 months.
41. Sixty-one of the 70 children and young people receiving support were female. At 87% this is comparable to the 89% in the 2024 report with the baseline report rate being 98%. This highlights that **both** males and females are at risk of CSE.
42. The average age of these children and young people was 15, the same as the 2024 report and the 2023 baseline report.
43. Fifty-six of these children and young people were 'White British' (81%) with a further 6 'Other White' (8%). A further 6 (8%) were of a 'Mixed' ethnicity, 1 was Black (1%) and 1 was Asian (1%). This ethnicity profile broadly mirrors the 2024 report and the baseline report findings and reflects the borough's 10-to-17-year-old ethnicity profile.
44. Twelve children and young people had an Education, Health and Care Plan ('EHCP') (17%, 14% in 2024 compared with 3.9% borough-wide) and 32 were in receipt of support for special educational needs and disability (SEND) support (46%, 41% in 2024 compared with 15% borough-wide). SEND covers a wide variety of need and, broadly, can be categorised as social, emotional and

mental health, communication and interaction, cognitive and learning and sensory and physical difficulties. In 2023/24 a multi-agency case file audit was completed to aid better understanding of the way in which we can support children and young people with SEND and are at risk of CSE. This led to greater integration between the CATE team, Strengthening Families and SEND team, specialist training for schools' staff curriculum adaptations around healthy and appropriate relationships involving SEND pupils, and raising parent awareness.

45. Thirty-five (50%, 48% 2023/24) had persistent absence from education (attendance <90% and >50%), 12 (17%, 17% 2023/24) had severe absence (<50% attendance), and 21 (30%, 31% 2023/24) had satisfactory attendance. In comparison with the 2023 baseline report, there was a smaller proportion of children with severe absence (26% 2023 baseline report) and more with satisfactory attendance (26% 2023 baseline report). Compared with attendance in all secondary schools within the borough, school attendance of those children and young people that have been in receipt of safeguarding support from CATE because of CSE was noticeably lower.
46. Support for pupils with absences may be in the form of early help or more targeted support which can take a variety of forms, including working with other agencies, consideration of an adapted timetable to support a return to school or referral to a local authority alternative provision or targeted work with the child, their family members, care-givers, and the school.
47. There were 38 (25 2023/24) missing episodes³ recorded against 12 (9 2023/24) children and young people, all of which were eligible for a return home interview. Return home interviews are undertaken to help identify any support that children and young people might need to help keep them safe. All received an interview, with 97% (96% 2023/24) completed in timescale (3 days) – a sustained improvement on 91% from the 2023 baseline report. Reasons why return home interviews are not completed within the 3-day target include there being back-to-back missing episodes or when episodes occur over a bank holiday period.
48. Of the children and young people open to CATE, just over half, 54% (51% 2023/24), had also been open to statutory safeguarding based on presenting needs in comparison to 59% in the 2023 baseline report. This is an important element of the CATE pathway model; a child or young person can receive specialist support from CATE and statutory safeguarding services to ensure that all children and young people are given all appropriate support and are safeguarded based on their needs.

West Mercia Police Criminal Justice Data

49. As part of the development of this report, details of **all** CSE cases open to CATE in 2024/25 were shared between Telford & Wrekin Council and West Mercia Police analysts to:

³ A child reported as 'missing' to the Police by their family or carers.

- ensure that all relevant cases were known to the Police and that relevant investigations were undertaken and their outcome;
 - identify and profile suspects; and,
 - identify the location of criminal activity.
50. Following analysis, it was confirmed that all children and young people who were open to CATE for support because of CSE were known to the West Mercia Police Child Exploitation Team in line with multi-agency safeguarding procedures. Similarly, all children known to the West Mercia Police Child Exploitation Team were known to the Council. Not all children known to the West Mercia Police Child Exploitation Team are at risk or a victim of CSE because a number are Child Criminal Exploitation Cases.
51. West Mercia Police has found 53 recorded CSE offences/incidents (80 offences/incidents 2023/24) were investigated, relating to sexual abuse, sexual exploitation and / or sexual assault reported to the Police. Over half of the CSE offences/incidents related to online offending which predominantly involved inciting children to send indecent images of themselves in exchange for a commodity.
52. Of the 53 offences/incidents, 2 (5%) resulted in a suspect being charged or summonsed whilst 10 are still currently under investigation. Of the 2 who were charged, both were found guilty.
53. Twenty-six individual suspects were identified within suspect analysis. These were linked to 24 of the offences/incidents.

West Mercia Police CSE Suspect profile

54. Analysis of the demographic characteristics across the three CSE annual reports has found variation in the annual suspect profile. For example, the 2023/24 suspect cohort was different to the 2023 baseline report suspect profile in that, overall, the cohort was older, and more ethnically diverse. These differences illustrate that perpetrators of CSE can, and do, come from any background or community.
55. In terms of the 2024/25 suspect profile, police data shows that this group were predominantly male, aged less than 24 and of a 'White' ethnicity:
- In terms of gender, where recorded by the police, 74% of the suspects were male and 26% were female. The 2023/24 report found that 98% of suspects were male and the 2023 baseline report found that 89% of suspects were male.
 - Police records indicate that, in terms of age, 38% of the suspects were aged 17 or less, 19% aged 18 to 25 and 42% aged 26 or older. In the 23/24 report, 24% of suspects were aged under 18 and in the 2023 baseline report 54% were aged under 18.

- Where self-defined ethnicity was recorded by West Mercia Police 18 (87%) suspects were White with there being one (4%) suspect who was 'Other Asian', one suspect (4%) who was 'Indian' and another suspect (4%) who was 'Other Mixed Background'. The 2023/24 report suspect profile found that 47% of suspects were White and in the baseline report 83% of suspects were 'White'. This changing profile highlights how those suspected of committing CSE offences can come from any background.
56. The recording of self-defined ethnicity of suspects by the Police improved during the last six months of the data period (October 2024 – March 2025) in comparison to the first six months (April – September 2024). Three suspects did not have a self-defined ethnicity recorded in the first 6-month period, whereas in the second six-month period a self-defined ethnicity was recorded against all suspects. Improving the recording of data related to those suspected of committing CSE, is a recommendation of the National Audit into CSE by Baroness Casey.

NRM Referrals

57. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a framework for identifying and referring potential victims of modern slavery and ensuring they receive appropriate support. Modern slavery is complex and may involve multiple forms of exploitation.
58. In 2023/24 the Council adopted a new policy in relation NRM referrals such that any child that is open to CATE has an NRM referral made. This change was in recognition that if a child has an open CATE case, then, they are *at risk* of modern slavery which is the essential criteria for a referral to the NRM.
59. As a result of the introduction of this new policy, there has been a significant increase in the number of NRM referrals made by the Council over the past 2 years with 53 in 2023/24 and 49 in 2024/25.
60. In July 2025, the Council in partnership with the NHS and West Mercia Police became 1 of 8 authorities chosen by the government for a third phase pilot of local decision-making for the NRM specifically for child referrals. This will ensure that decisions are timely and that victims get the support they need and to which they are entitled as quickly as possible. This will be closely monitored with reports submitted to government on the effectiveness of the pilot.

Early Help Provision by Schools & Colleges

61. A key response to tackling CSE, is the early identification of those children and young people who are more likely to be at risk of CSE so that they can be supported through early help. Schools and colleges are core to this early identification and leading the provision of early help support where the risk to the child or young person is assessed as low.

62. The work to collate the information from schools and colleges on those children and young people who are low risk is led by the 24 organisations in the CSE Lead network. Across 2024/25, they identified a total of 55 new children and young people who were assessed as being at low risk to CSE (2023/24 182). Audit work has been completed to understand why there was a reduction in the number of new children and young people being identified as a low risk to CSE.
63. The reasons why there has been a reduction in the number of new children and young people has been considered by the school “CSE-lead” network. A key finding of this was that, in 2023/24, one education setting accounted for over half of the new children identified. Detailed assessment work of these children was completed and they were assessed as not being CSE-related. Training has been completed with that setting to ensure that the risk factors to CSE are understood and that appropriate action is taken in response. The number of new children and young people identified by that setting has reduced.
64. For each child or young person that was assessed as low risk of CSE, the school or college identified and recorded the CSE risk indicators. Most children and young people had multiple risk indicators. The three most stated indicators were ‘concerns and changes in peer relationships’ (35, 64% of cases), ‘becoming emotional or moody’ (28, 51% of cases) and ‘concerns raised by friends, neighbours and the local community’ (27, 49% of cases).
65. The key characteristics of the 55 children and young people identified by secondary schools and colleges as low risk of CSE were:
- 58% (69% 2023/24, 59% baseline report) of these children and young people were female and 42% male.
 - The average age was 14.2 years (15.5 years 2023/24, 14 years baseline report).
 - 84% (86% 2023/24) of the children and young people were ‘White’, 6% (5% 2023/24) were ‘Mixed’, 5% (3% 2023/24) ‘Asian’ and 4% (2% 2023/24) ‘Black British, Caribbean or African’ and 2% ‘Other ethnic group’. This is broadly comparable with the ethnicity profile of the borough’s 10 to 17-year-olds.
 - With regard to SEND 7% (8% 2023/24) of this cohort had an EHCP plan (compared to 3.9% borough wide) and 35% (36% 2023/24) received SEND support compared to the borough-wide rate of 15%. In comparison to the 2023 baseline report this represents an increase of 8%-points in the proportion that are in receipt of SEND support.
 - Of this 55 children and young people, 8 (15%, 18% 2023/24) of the children and young people were not receiving an education. Of those that were receiving an education, 19 (40%, 23% 2023/24) had satisfactory attendance. Twenty-two (47%, 66% 2023/24) had persistent absence and 6 (13%, 10% 2023/24) had severe absence.

Incident location

- Twenty seven percent of the identified incidents took place online – this compared to 25% in the 2023/24 report. Excluding those online, the location of an additional 20 cases was described. These locations covered a very broad mix of spaces and locations across the borough. This information has been shared through the Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership and CSE lead network.

Early Help

66. As these children and young people were identified as a low risk to CSE, they were all offered support by their secondary school or college, and/or from other agencies. Which organisation provided that support was based on the child or young person's specific needs. The majority of these children and young people, 39 (71%, 2023/24 73%) were offered support from the education setting at which they were a learner, 37 (67%, 39% 2023/24) received support from Police & Community Support Officers who work with schools and colleges to tackle exploitation, and 23 (42%, 25% 2023/24) received support from mental health services.

Recommendation 7. Ring-fencing of CATE Team resource and Recommendation 2.3 Staffing Workloads Telford & Wrekin Council CATE & West Mercia Police CE team

Telford & Wrekin Council CATE Team

67. Alongside calling for the Council to commit to the continued existence of the CATE Team within Telford at no less than its current strength in both numbers and budget (adjusted for inflation), for a period of no fewer than five years from the date of publication of the IITCSE report, the IITCSE report called for the Council to publish information regarding the resourcing and workloads of the CATE Team as part of the 'Joint CSE Review Group's' Annual Report.
68. The current structure of the team is:
- 10 CATE workers (case holder)
 - 1 Social worker (case holder)
 - 1 Team Leader (case holder)
 - 1 Group Manager
69. As to creating a benchmark for the current strength and workloads of the CATE team, the baseline has been taken as July 2022 when the IITCSE report was published.
70. In developing a baseline for the CATE team, an assessment of all cases held by the team has been undertaken and not just CSE cases. Processes have been put in place to monitor, on a monthly basis, the caseloads of the CATE workers by the Director: Children's Safeguarding and Family Support.

71. As at July 2022, the average caseload for CATE workers was 8, in March 2024 7 and in March 2025 6.

West Mercia Police Child Exploitation Team

72. The structure of the team is currently:
- A Detective Inspector
 - Two Detective Sergeants
 - Eight Detective Constables – with four reporting to each of the two Detective Sergeants.
 - A CE coordinator
 - A Child Exploitation Analyst

73. The team has a caseload of 35 open investigations with a caseload of 26 victims.

Recommendation 2.7: Details of PCC funded resources and initiatives and Recommendation 40. PCC to commit to continued funding of CSE initiatives: Taxi Marshall scheme and Street Pastors.

74. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) provided £1.9m funding to support CSE across West Meria through the following services:
- West Mercia Rape and Sexual Assault Centre – ‘The Branch Project’ - This project delivers education, intervention, and support to children and young people (CYP) who are at risk of, or have experienced, child sexual exploitation (CSE). – West Mercia Wide.
 - AXIS Counselling for Independent Sexual Violence Adviser (ISVA) Services across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin was allocated to support a Child ISVA, a children and young people with disabilities ISVA and a Family Court ISVA.
 - Paediatric Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) - Funding was provided to the West Midlands Paediatric Sexual Assault Service, now renamed the NHS England Sexual Assault and Referral Service (SARS). This region-wide service offers expert care to children and young people who have disclosed sexual assault or may have experienced sexual abuse.
 - AXIS Counselling - Funding was granted for one dedicated children’s counsellor across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.
 - Shropshire, Telford, and Wrekin SARC Redevelopment - The Commissioner is committed to establishing a Forensic Science Regulator (FSR) compliant SARC in Shropshire, Telford, and Wrekin. Phase 2 redevelopment work is scheduled to begin in October 2025, with funding secured through the NHS and the Commissioner’s capital investment budget. As part of the planning process, Lived Experience Consultees from Telford met with the Estates team from the Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner and provided valuable input, which directly influenced adaptations to the site plans.

75. In 2024/25, the PCC commissioned a West Mercia-wide Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Needs Assessment. The purpose of the assessment was to inform future service commissioning and shape strategies for the prevention of CSE. Following this, a competitive procurement process was undertaken and Catch 22 was appointed as the successful provider. They will deliver a joint Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and CSE service across West Mercia, commencing on 1st April 2025.
76. In addition to directly funding CSE initiatives and projects, the West Mercia Police and Crime Commissioner also provides funding opportunities through the Telford & Wrekin Community Safety Partnership. Through this process, funding has been secured to support two key schemes focussed on the night-time economy to protect the welfare of adults as they leave licensed premises. These are:
- **Taxi Marshalls** (£16,000 annual funding): - an essential part of keeping people safe within the night-time economy, especially when leaving the area and looking for taxis. The Taxi Marshalls play a vital role in supporting the Street Pastors in the early intervention of potential incidents. The Taxi Marshalls also support the approach in managing touting & 'plying for hire'.
 - **Street Pastors** (£7,190 annual funding): These volunteers collaborate with the police to support those enjoying a night out. Their role includes offering water, flip flops, or simply a friendly chat, all aimed at helping people get home safely.

Recommendation 2.10 A summary of any complaints received by any of the member authorities regarding the handling of a CSE matter

77. Telford & Wrekin Council and NHS Telford & Wrekin ICB did not record any complaints in 2024/25 with regard to how they have responded to cases and incidents of CSE.
78. West Mercia Police recorded 4 complaints in 2024/25 relating to a CSE matter. The details of these complaints are set out below with each complaint having been "resolved" in line with West Mercia Police's complaints procedure:
- Dissatisfaction with the service received from West Mercia Police in regard to the police response to the complainant's report of a missing person (child) at risk of CSE.
 - Dissatisfaction with the service received from West Mercia Police in regards to the police response to them reporting suspicious activity relating to sexual exploitation.
 - Dissatisfaction with the service received from West Mercia Police in regards to the police response in relation to the lack of an investigation of a person suspected of historic inappropriate behaviour with a child.

- Dissatisfaction with the service received from West Mercia Police in regards to restrictions on membership of Missing and Child Exploitation group.

Schools and Education Settings

79. As described above, the Council has worked with the lived experience consultees to develop core content for CSE awareness raising. This has been used to train Designated Safeguarding Leads in schools ('DSLs') and CSE Leads (known as CSE DSLs) to deliver awareness raising to staff and parents.
80. The Education Safeguarding Team on behalf of the Telford & Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership undertake cyclical and risk led safeguarding audit visits to all schools and colleges in the borough. As part of these visits, officers are testing out staff awareness of CSE, the impact of the curriculum in raising pupils and students' awareness of CSE. The officers are also monitoring the delivery of schools and colleges CSE awareness raising for parents.
81. The Education Safeguarding Team, who deliver a range of child protection and safeguarding training to schools and colleges, have updated their training materials, specifically raising awareness of child protection and safeguarding training. This is to include the core content CSE awareness materials to help to continually raise the awareness of CSE with staff working in schools and colleges.
82. The Education Safeguarding Team on behalf of the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership will continue to undertake cyclical and risk led safeguarding audit visits to all schools and colleges in the borough. Officers will, through these visits, continue to monitor the impact of schools and colleges delivery of awareness raising to staff, parents and pupils and address any deficiencies.
83. The Education Safeguarding Team along with the Telford and Wrekin Safeguarding Partnership will continue to provide advice, guidance and training to school and college leaders, DSLs and CSE Leads with regards to CSE awareness raising with staff, parents and pupils.

Recommendation 26.1 The Council should publish annually, as part of the 'Joint CSE Review Group's' Annual Report, a taxi licensing review.

84. It is estimated that there are around 900 taxis operating in Telford & Wrekin, of which around a third are licensed by Telford & Wrekin Council with the remainder licensed by other authorities. In 2024/25, the Council received 57 complaints about taxi drivers:
 - 39 related to drivers licensed with Telford & Wrekin Council
 - 18 were about drivers licensed with other local authorities
85. These complaints related to a number of different concerns, such as service standards, vehicle standards or driving standards.

86. For many years, Telford & Wrekin Council has referred complaints about drivers licensed with other local authorities to the relevant licensing authority. However, under the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022, there has now been introduced as a duty for licensing services from 31 May 2022. The Act also requires complaints about taxi drivers which relate to safeguarding or road safety concerns to be acted upon in a specified timeframe. This covers relevant information indicating that a person has committed a sexual offence (regardless of whether the person was charged with, prosecuted for or convicted of the offence). All complaints referred to other authorities are followed-up by Telford & Wrekin Council Licensing team for a response on the outcome of the complaint.
87. On conclusion of a complaint, the Council can take the following actions:
- For a new or renewal application, the authority can refuse to grant a licence or put conditions / time limits on a licence.
 - Once licensed, the council can suspend a licence, issue warnings, retrain drivers and revoke a licence.
88. The actions taken against taxi driver complaints in 2024/5 were:
- All of the 18 complaints for drivers licensed with other local authorities were referred to the relevant authority. Of these, 5 were safeguarding-related. None of these safeguarding matters were of a CSE nature.
 - Of the 39 complaints that related to drivers licensed with Telford & Wrekin Council:
 - 23 had advice issued;
 - 3 drivers were referred to complete and pass the Council's Knowledge and Driver Course;
 - 3 cases resulted in enforcement action and licence revocation following review hearings; and,
 - 10 complaints were found to be unjustified because of inadequate evidence.

Licensing Enforcement Activity

89. In 2024/25 the Council's licensing team carried out 14 multi-agency taxi licensing enforcement exercises. This included:
- 3 'plying for hire' exercises to identify minicab drivers operating without pre-booked journeys.
 - 11 vehicle stop checks conducted in partnership with the Police under the multiagency targeted enforcement strategy (MATES) initiative, focusing on roadworthiness and safety.
 - 14 checks on designated taxi ranks to monitor compliance.

90. On all operations both the driver and vehicle are checked to ensure compliance with their licensing conditions. These include checks on the driver's identity against their licence. This has not identified any concerns about badge swapping, although advice and warnings have been given to drivers not wearing their badge in accordance with their licence conditions.
91. In addition to this activity, the Taxi Marshals carry out identity checks on all taxis picking up passengers when they are carrying out their duties in the night-time economy.

Recommendations 2.6, 37, 42 call for systematic CSE training

CSE Awareness Training

92. In 2023, the lived experience consultees developed a training package that set out what CSE is, the behaviours and risk factors, and the action which should be taken when a child or young person was identified as being at risk of CSE. It was agreed that the content of this package was the minimum level of knowledge that **all** staff, irrespective of role, across the three statutory partners should have and as such, would ensure consistency in the understanding of and response to CSE. It is important to emphasise that this training is a minimum, and that depending on role, practitioners will continue to receive other relevant CSE training of an appropriate level.

NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

93. The roll out of the CSE awareness training across the health system has continued to progress, with all trusts working towards staff compliance. Due to the high numbers of staff that required this training, this has been rolled out in stages, with priority staff groups being the first to complete this, with the aim that the training is being added to their training systems and will be shared with all staff groups. The current compliance data is below:
 - Integrated Care Board - 94%
 - Shropshire and Telford Hospital Trust - 94%
 - Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust - 48%
 - Shropshire Community Health Trust - 73%
 - Robert Jones Agnes Hunt - 92%
94. MPFT are aware of the current low compliance and there have been challenges in ensuring the training is accessible for the correct staff group. This has included delivering the training face to face for some staff groups which may have had an impact on the compliance uptake. CSE awareness has been raised through their Trust's social media pages as well as through their child safeguarding week. The uptake of the training is being escalated through the safeguarding and service leads, and compliance continues to be monitored through quarterly safeguarding dashboards and via the contract review meetings.

West Mercia Police

95. West Mercia Police have commissioned NWG Network, a charity that is focused on tackling child exploitation through working with organisations and parents and carers to deliver appropriate training on CSE in the context of modern slavery that includes the core training described above. Roll-out of this face-to-face training to all Police officers and relevant civilian staff and initially prioritising Safer Neighbourhood Teams who work out in the community. Rollout of this training is currently at 30%.

Telford & Wrekin Council

96. Completion of the CSE training package is mandatory for all Council employees and is monitored to ensure compliance. The completion rate for this course in 2024/25 was 96%.