The audit was undertaken in response to the low number of children on a child protection plans for Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) and a potential Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) in respect of children and young people who are at risk of, or who are subject to sexual abuse in the family environment.

**Aim/objective:**
The audit aimed to look at multi-agency arrangements for the response to CSA in the family environment;
- the quality and impact of assessment, planning and decision-making in response to notifications and referrals
- protecting children and young people at risk of a specific type (or types) of harm, or the support and care of children looked after and/or care leavers (evaluated through a ‘deep dive’ investigation into the experiences of these children)
- the leadership and management of this work
- the effectiveness of the multi-agency safeguarding partner arrangements in relation to this work.

**Agencies who took part in the audit:**

**Methodology**
3 cases were identified for each Local Authority area (3 for Bedford Borough, 3 for Central Bedfordshire and 3 for Luton)
- 1 from each of the following age ranges 0 – 7yrs, 8 – 14yrs and 15 - 18 yrs.
- 1 case a Looked after Child and the other 2 cases currently open to children’s services for the last 12 – 18 months.
Unfortunately, one of the Bedford Borough cases was withdrawn from the audit due to an ongoing criminal court case.

**NSPCC Facts and statistics**

**Disabled children** are more likely to be abused than non-disabled children.

**Most child sexual abuse isn’t reported, detected or prosecuted.**

**Most children don’t tell anyone that they’re being sexually abused.**

**It’s a crime that is usually only witnessed by the abuser and the victim**

1 in 20 children in the UK have been sexually abused

Over 2,800 children were identified as needing protection from sexual abuse in 2016/17

1 in 3 children sexually abused by an adult did not tell anyone

Over 90% of sexually abused children were abused by someone they knew

Around a third of CSA is committed by other children/young people

13% of contacts to the NSPCC’s helpline in 2017/18 were concerns about sexual abuse

Over 63,000 sexual offences against children were recorded by the police in the UK in 2016/17

Nearly 30,000 registered offenders have been convicted of offences against children.

“When abuse is happening to you, you feel very isolated. You know that you need to tell someone, or you may even feel this urge to tell someone, but you know you can’t because that fear will overrun your whole body and your mind.”

(Teenage girl aged 13)
**Issues**

When concerns were initially raised about a child/young person’s sexualised behaviour they were not assessed fully.

Practitioners focused on other forms of abuse and did not necessarily consider CSA.

The disclosures were made to trusted adults but these adults were not then involved in the interview process.

How was gender considered with regards to the service/intervention provided?

If the young person does not recount the same allegations to another practitioner it was questioned whether the incident actually happened.

Some practitioners lacked confidence in talking to children and young people about CSA.

Do practitioners understand the grooming process and sex offender cycle?

Information sharing – minutes/notes are not shared or accessible.

The use of Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) interviews and Child Protection medicals was inconsistent

Disability appeared to be a factor which inhibits identification of CSA.

Recognising just because a case does not meet threshold for criminal prosecution that does not mean that something has not happened.

Ensuring that practitioners gather the basic details about who is residing in a house with a child(ren)/young people and ensuring that the necessary checks are undertaken. In one case this was not done and it later transpired a sex offender had moved into the house.

For some unaccompanied asylum seekers their expectations and cultural differences around relationships and sexual activity.

**Areas for development;**

- How and what should we be doing to assist the child/young person in disclosing CSA?
- The use of trusted adults in ABE Interviews and increase the number of interviews being led by Social Workers
- Improving identification of and assessment of CSA
- Understanding how CSA fits into the context of CSE and online abuse
- Do practitioners understand CSA and can determine what healthy sexual behaviour is?
- How confident are professionals in identifying and managing Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSB) using the appropriate pathways?
- What support/response is there if the case does not meet threshold for criminal prosecution?

**Good Practice;**

In the majority of the cases schools were doing things in a timely manner. The Teachers and Health Visitors involved in the cases provided consistency for the children and young people as they had been in post a while and so made a positive difference.

**Actions:**

Pan Beds Policy and procedures Group to finalise the Pan Bedfordshire Harmful Sexual Behaviour Guidance for Practitioners, launch and disseminate.

To clarify what is offered to Police and Children Services in respect of Achieving Best Evidence (ABE) training and whether there could be opportunities for joint training?

Ascertain how confident practitioners are in talking to children and young people about CSA?

How does single and multi-agency training develop practitioner’s skills in talking to children/young people about CSA?

What support/response is there if the case does not meet threshold for criminal prosecution?

What other services are available to address CSA other than AIM Programme?

The 3 Boards to seek assurances as to how agencies are;

- Developing safer/healthy relationships for unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- Helping young people with a disability to understand sexual relationships and CSA?
- Assisting practitioners in recognising the risk of CSA to children with disabilities?

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For access to the Pan Bedfordshire multi-agency child protection procedures please go to [http://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.com/index.htm](http://bedfordscb.proceduresonline.com/index.htm).


[https://www.beds.ac.uk/ic/recently-completed-projects/making-noise](https://www.beds.ac.uk/ic/recently-completed-projects/making-noise)

Key messages from research on intra-familial child sexual abuse - Di McNeish and Sara Scott, DMSS Research, June 2018

[https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-publications/key-messages/intra-familial-csa/](https://www.csacentre.org.uk/research-publications/key-messages/intra-familial-csa/)