



Minutes of Meeting

Saving Futures - Sixth Senedd Cross Party Group on Preventing Child Sexual Abuse

Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: Tackling Risks to Girls Online

Meeting Details

Title: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse: Tackling Risks to Girls Online

Date: Thursday 17th July 2025

Time: 12.00-13.30

Location: Virtual - Teams

Sponsored by Buffy Williams MS

Attendees (34)

- Buffy Williams – CPG Chair (BW)
- Mabon ap Gwynfor – CPG Deputy Chair (MaG)
- Ruth Mullineux-Morgan – CPG Secretary, Senior Policy Officer, NSPCC Cymru (RMM)
- Cecile Gwilym – Policy & Public Affairs Manager, NSPCC Cymru (CG)
- Zuzanna Gwozdz – Policy & Public Affairs Assistant, NSPCC Cymru (ZG)
- Saul Cooke-Black - Media Liaison, NSPCC (SCB)
- Prof. EJ Renold – Professor of Childhood Studies, Cardiff University (EJR)
- Fay Maxted – CPG Secretariat, CEO, Survivor's Trust (FM)
- Fflur Emlyn – CPG Secretariat, Operations Manager, RASAC (FE)
- Karen Garland – Research & Policy Officer, Marie Collins Foundation (KG)
- Linda Grace – Chair of Trustees, Jig.So Children's Centre (LG)
- Kate Rothwell - Welsh Government DRiES Team (KR)
- Sara Kirkpatrick – CEO, Welsh Women's Aid (SK)
- Deborah Sargent - Hwb Education Technology Service Owner, Welsh Government (DS)
- Siân Bibey (SB) - Children in Wales



- Dr Sophie Hallett - Reader in Social Policy - CYP, Social Care, Prevention of SA, Cardiff University (SH)
- Susan Moore – CPG Secretariat, CEO, We Stand (SM)
- Tom Davies (TD) - The Children’s Society
- Paula Williams (PW) - Director of Strategy and Planning for the Youth Justice Board of England and Wales.
- Catrin Simpson - Clinical Lead for Children and Young People, SARC (CS)
- Sarah Cooper – Head of Digital Resilience Team, Welsh Government DRiES Team (SC)
- Debbie Woodroffe - New Pathways (DW)
- Emma Rushton (ER) - Operations Manager, Stori Wales
- Lee Gonzalez (LG) - Office of Joel James MS
- Katy Jackson - Public Policy and Advocacy Manager, Thirtyone:eight (KJ)
- Katy Smith – Project Worker, Lucy Faithfull Foundation (KS)
- Dr Kirsty Hudson – Reader in Criminology, Cardiff University (KH)
- Catherine Lewis – Schools Liaison Coordinator, South Wales Police (CL)
- Nici Evans - Practice Improvement Advisor, Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse, Barnardo’s (NE)
- Sam Lewis (SL)
- Sarah Thomas (ST)
- Yashiba Sanil - Communications and Campaigns Officer, Welsh Women's Aid (YS)

Apologies

- Philip Walker - CPG Secretariat, National Development Manager, Survivors Trust (PW)
- Gillian Jones - CPG Secretariat, Lucy Faithful Foundation Wales (CS)
- Claire Short - CPG Secretariat, Lucy Faithful Foundation Wales (CS)



Agenda

Agenda Item	Topic	Speaker	Time
1	AGM, Annual Report and Appointment of Mabon ap Gwynfor MS as Deputy Chair.	CPG Secretariat	12:00 - 12:30 pm
2	Welcome and Opening Remarks.	Buffy Williams MS	12:30 – 12:35 pm
3	Overview and introduction to the research.	Cecile Gwilym – Policy & Public Affairs Manager, NSPCC Cymru	12:35 – 12:40 pm
4	Importance of intersectionality.	Sara Kirkpatrick - CEO, Welsh Women’s Aid	12:40 – 12:50 pm
5	Presenting findings from the new NSPCC research report on Targeting Girls Online.	Rani Govender - UK CSO Policy Manager, NSPCC	12:50 – 1:10 pm
6	Q&A.	All	1:10 – 1:25 pm
7	Summing up and meeting close.	Buffy Williams MS	1:25 – 1:30 pm

Minutes

1. Call to Order.

[Time: 12.00]

2. Agenda Item 1: AGM, Annual Report and Appointment of Mabon ap Gwynfor MS as Deputy Chair.



Discussion

- Buffy Williams Ms, the CPG Chair, opened the AGM and welcomed attendees. She expressed appreciation for continued support and engagement.
- Annual Report - The Annual Report was formally laid before the group. It highlighted achievements, challenges, and progress over the past year.
- The report was accepted without objections and will be tabled by the Table Office.
- Election of Deputy Chair - MaG was nominated and confirmed as Deputy Chair. No further nominations were received.
- Confirmation of Office Holders - The list of office holders was shared and confirmed without objections.
- Closing of AGM - BW thanked attendees and looked forward to another year of progress and collaboration.

Decisions:

- Voting - Votes were held and carried for:
 - Acceptance of the Annual Report
 - Election of the Deputy Chair
 - Confirmation of office holders

Actions: N/A

3. Agenda Item 2: Welcome and Opening Remarks.

Discussion

- BW Welcomed attendees and acknowledged the launch of the Welsh Government's consultation on the second National CSA Strategy.
- BW emphasised the importance of a public health approach and collective responsibility.
- BW encouraged responses to the consultation, especially with intersectional perspectives.
- BW introduced the NSPCC's research report Targeting Girls Online, highlighting the risks girls face online and the need for services to be safe by design.

Decisions: N/A

Actions: N/A



4. Agenda Item 3: Overview and introduction to the research.

Discussion

- Cecile Gwilym, Policy and Public Affairs Manager at NSPCC Cymru, opened by thanking attendees and echoing support for the Welsh Government's new CSA strategy. She welcomed the strategy's public health approach and encouraged all present to respond to the consultation. CG emphasised the importance of ensuring children's voices are heard and committed to working with partners to support this.
- CG introduced the Targeting Girls Online report, which investigates how online platforms can be used by perpetrators to identify and abuse girls. The research focused on ten popular platforms across social media, gaming, messaging, and video-sharing services. Using fake accounts of a fictitious 14-year-old girl, the study explored how easily she could be found and contacted.
- The research methodology included:
 - Mapping typical user journeys
 - Reviewing existing literature on online victimisation
 - Interviewing eight experts in platform design, cyber safety, and child protection
 - Testing how discoverable the fictitious girl was to adult users
- Key findings revealed that platform design features—such as friend suggestions, public profiles, and algorithmic recommendations—can increase girls' visibility and vulnerability. Many platforms failed to prevent inappropriate or abusive contact.
- The report calls for urgent action from:
 - Government: to legislate for safer platform design
 - Technology companies: to embed safety into the core of their platforms
 - Ofcom: to ensure robust regulation
 - Researchers: to centre girls' experiences in their work
- CG highlighted the need to understand girls' experiences in their own right, noting that their voices are often lost in broader child safety or VAWG discussions. She stressed the importance of recognising intersectional vulnerabilities, particularly for girls from LGBTQ+ and ethnic minority backgrounds or those with additional needs. While the current research couldn't explore all protected characteristics in depth, this remains a priority for future work.
- CG also noted the need to review and update key Welsh Government strategies:
 - The Digital Resilience in Education Action Plan, now over five years old
 - The VAWDASV Strategy, which currently lacks reference to online harms
 - The CSA Strategy, which must reflect the diversity of children's lived experiences



- CG announced a follow-up workshop on 18 September at the NSPCC Wales Hub to explore these issues through an intersectional lens. Insights from today's session and the workshop will inform:
- NSPCC's recommendations to Ofcom for its VAWG guidance
- Their response to the Welsh Government's CSA Strategy consultation
- Advocacy for a new VAWDASV strategy that addresses online harms to girls
- She concluded by urging attendees to reflect and commit to action, ensuring that future Welsh Government strategies are strong, resourced, and responsive to the realities of children's experiences of sexual abuse in all forms.
- She then handed over to Sara Kirkpatrick, CEO of Welsh Women's Aid, to further explore the importance of intersectionality in addressing online risks and harms to girls.

Decisions: N/A

Actions: N/A

5. Agenda Item 4: Importance of intersectionality.

Discussion

- Sara Kirkpatrick, CEO of Welsh Women's Aid, began by introducing the concept of intersectionality, explaining why this approach is essential when tackling violence against women and girls (VAWG). SK emphasised that each individual experiences the world through a unique combination of factors, such as race, gender identity, disability, and socioeconomic status - which must be considered in policy and practice.
- SK reflected on the current state of intersectionality in Wales, acknowledging the Welsh Government's strong commitments to inclusion and diversity through action plans on anti-racist practice, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and disability. However, she noted that good intentions must be translated into action, and that connectivity between these commitments is crucial to truly reflect lived experiences.
- SK stressed the need for disaggregated data to measure progress and identify unintended consequences. Without it, efforts may lack impact or fail to address the most pressing needs. She advocated for a long-term approach with clear milestones, urging stakeholders to be brave enough to learn and evolve plans without constantly restarting.
- Intersectionality is not just a concept; it's a practice. It must inform the development of policies and agendas from the outset, not as an afterthought.



- Linking to the online context, SK highlighted how the internet has made the world more connected, but also more vulnerable to siloed and harmful ideologies. She pointed to the rise of the manosphere, where misogyny is flourishing, and stressed that young people live as much in virtual spaces as physical ones. Therefore, policy and practice must consider how messages and protections carry into the digital world.
- SK also raised concerns about the early adoption of AI, warning that without diverse developers, these tools risk reflecting narrow perspectives. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity—starting from education settings and extending into all areas of digital development.
- Sara welcomed the NSPCC’s research and its focus on gender and age, but emphasised the need to explore how other characteristics intersect and intensify risks. She encouraged attendees to contribute to discussions and ensure that diverse voices inform not only government policy but also organisational responses.

Decisions: N/A

Actions: N/A

6. Agenda Item 5: Presenting findings from the new NSPCC research report on Targeting Girls Online.

Discussion

- Rani Govender’s prerecorded presentation was shown to discuss the findings of the Targeting Girls Online report, published in May 2025. She began by emphasising that people’s lives are inherently shaped by their identities, and this research specifically focused on the intersection of gender and age, looking at girls as a distinct group rather than subsuming them under broader categories like “children.”
- RG acknowledged the valuable insights provided by Childline, which helped the team understand the real risks girls face online. These include:



- Image-based abuse and extortion
- Exposure to misogynistic content
- Grooming, cyberflashing, and sexual harassment
- Feelings of isolation, fear, and being dismissed when seeking help
- The research aimed to explore whether platform design facilitates the exploitation of girls. It found that the dynamics of online abuse vary depending on the type of abuse, and that girls face increased and specific risks that warrant focused study.
- Methodology:
 - Used an abusability testing approach to assess how platform design enables abuse.
 - Created fake profiles of a 14-year-old girl across 10 platforms (social media, gaming, messaging).
 - Developed perpetrator archetypes to simulate potential interactions, based on expert input (no real interactions occurred).
 - Mapped user journeys to reflect how girls typically engage with these platforms.
- Key Insights:
 - Platforms are not designed with children in mind. None of the 10 platforms flagged or intervened when adult researchers created child accounts with false ages.
 - Platforms failed to account for developmental differences between children and adults.
 - Girls' lower risk awareness and heightened curiosity were not considered in platform design.
 - The burden of safety is placed almost entirely on girls, who are expected to resist risky prompts and avoid abuse.
- Design Solutions:
 - The team developed 27 design solutions to shift responsibility from girls to tech companies. Key risks and corresponding solutions included:
 - Account Creation: Platforms encouraged oversharing (e.g. photos, bios).
 - Solution: Lock bios for underage users; offer anonymised gender options to protect identity.
 - Connections: Girls could easily find and be found by others, including through recommendations.
 - Solution: Slow down introductions and reduce algorithmic pushing of connections.
 - Gift Giving: Features allowed strangers to send gifts or lure users to less safe platforms.



- Solution: Implement automated moderation tools; restrict gift exchanges to verified adult users; raise thresholds for livestreaming.
- Some of these solutions have already been reflected in Ofcom’s online codes of practice, but Rani stressed the need for a more expansive and proactive approach.
- Recommendations
 - Introduce age-sensitive design standards that recognise different developmental stages within childhood.
 - Ensure girls are recognised in their own right, not just within broader “children” or “VAWG” categories.
 - Call on governments and regulators, particularly Ofcom, to be granted explicit powers to enforce online safety standards that protect girls.
- RG concluded by reinforcing the urgency of embedding safety into platform design and ensuring that girls’ experiences are central to policy, regulation, and technological development.

Decisions: N/A

Actions: N/A

7. Agenda Item 6: Q&A

- RMM answered questions from the audience:
 - Role of AI in child abuse online, e.g. through bot harassment
 - Research conducted on girls and its ability to extend findings to boys – similar developmental risks
 - Value of recognising both risks but also protecting characteristics
 - The tough balance between empowering girls and overburdening them with responsibility for their own safety

8. Agenda Item 9: Summing up and meeting close.

- BW reiterated the importance of the topic and thanked all contributors.
- BW reminded attendees of the upcoming intersectionality workshop in September.
- BW confirmed that outcomes from this session will be published in a paper submitted to the government.



Date of Next Meeting:

TBC

Adjournment:

RMM

Prepared By: Zuzanna Gwozdz, NSPCC Cymru

Approved By: Ruth Mullineux-Morgan, NSPCC Cymru

-ENDS-