

# Together we can.

A manifesto for a  
safer society for all



If you have any questions about our Manifesto or would like to work with us to endorse any of our recommendations, please contact us.

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## About Thirtyone:eight

Thirtyone:eight is the UK's leading independent Christian safeguarding charity. We help individuals, organisations, charities, faith and community groups to protect vulnerable people from harm and abuse. We work with a network of thousands of organisations across the UK and internationally helping them to create safer places. We are leading experts in safeguarding, working with governments to inform legislation and promote high standards in safeguarding practice.

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**With thanks to all our staff and Trustees who contributed to the development of this Manifesto.**

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# Together we can create a safer society.



**Justin Humphreys**  
Thirtyone:eight's Chief Executive

**For nearly half a century Thirtyone:eight has been at the forefront of safeguarding and child protection in the UK working as a trusted champion for the rights of all children, young people and adults at risk of harm.**

The charity's formation in the early 1970's coincided with significant legislative reform to the child protection systems in the UK which sought to put children's welfare at the heart of how we care for the most vulnerable in our society.

Since those early days we've witnessed the development, evolution, and more recently the devolution of the legislative landscape surrounding safeguarding, driven in part by learning from past mistakes, and changes in international law and human rights. That process continues to this day.

In working shoulder-to-shoulder with over 10,000 grassroots organisations from the faith and charity sector across the UK to implement good safeguarding practice, we see the real-life impact legislation has on the ground for those delivering activities, care and support for children, young people, and adults.

In partnership with academic bodies, legislators, policy-makers and other like-minded organisations we've been hard at work to understand the risks that remain and the areas where improvement or development in legislation could help support the creation of safer places across all settings.

Despite the many challenges, the opportunity remains for us to develop laws and guidance which continue to support and enhance the hard-won protections already in place, to reform and strengthen existing legislation, and to break new ground in areas where there is still a lack of clear and effective policy and guidance.

In our ongoing work across the UK parliaments in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England to advocate and engage governments and parliamentarians we've already seen significant success. We know it works.

As a charity, our vision is of a world where every child and adult can feel, and be, safe. Can we make significant and tangible steps toward seeing that vision become a reality in our lifetime? **We believe that together we can.**

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Thank you for reading our manifesto. We look forward to engaging with parliamentarians, lawmakers, and like-minded organisations and individuals as we work together to make the most of the opportunities we have identified and outlined in this manifesto.

**Together we can make our society a place where every child and adult can feel, and be, safe.**

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# Themes and opportunities



**Leigh McFarlane**, Thirtyone:eight's Public Policy and Research Manager

This Manifesto sets out Thirtyone:eight's areas of interest and activity in relation to legislative and policy change across the UK. In it we have identified a number of key opportunities that exist to improve policy, legislation, and guidance. As the legal responsibility for these are split between the UK Government and the devolved administrations we've grouped our Manifesto into four regional sections.

We've developed our recommendations by drawing on published evidence and our own research to inform our calls for action. Our asks span a wide range of areas which we have structured under three common themes.

**Together we can:**



## Strengthen the safeguards in place for children and adults

This theme is all about the preventative actions that can be taken to protect people from harm. It's all about tightening-up the preventions and the penalties and stopping perpetrators of abuse from getting access to children and vulnerable groups. It's about increasing the protections in place for children and vulnerable adults at risk of harm from adult workers in positions of trust, and it's about further strengthening the vetting, checking and barring process to make it even more effective.

### Opportunities include:

- **Introducing a statutory definition of grooming across all four nations.**
- **Closing the loopholes that allow convicted Sex Offenders to change name and avoid detection.**
- **Widening the scope of existing Position of Trust legislation to protect more people.**
- **Reforming the Access NI vetting and barring scheme in Northern Ireland.**

**Together we can:**

## **2 Better protect victims and survivors**

This theme is all about supporting victims and survivors of abuse and considers how we offer better protections to those with lived experience of harm. Reporting cases of known and suspected abuse should be made mandatory across all the UK. There should be no excuses, no cover-ups. It's also about removing the defence of reasonable chastisement or punishment for those who harm children, and about helping survivors of abuse to have their voices heard.

**Opportunities include:**

- **Introducing robust mandatory reporting across all four nations.**
- **Removing the defence for reasonable chastisement/punishment of children in England and Northern Ireland.**
- **Reviewing laws in Northern Ireland which prevent victims of sexual abuse naming or identifying their alleged abuser in the public domain.**

**Together we can:**

## **3 Create safer environments for all**

This theme is about being proactive in our efforts to create safer environments for all. There are several significant opportunities that exist here to create policy and develop legislation that supports a safer society. A key focus across all four nations is making the online environment safer for all through the Online Safety Act 2023. It's also about making active efforts which support the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in England and Wales, and existing commitments to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

**Opportunities include:**

- **Implementing the Online Safety Act 2023.**
- **Embedding the principles of the UNCRC across all four nations.**
- **Implementing the recommendations from IICSA within England and Wales.**

# **A safer society for all**

**Working across these three themes we seek to engage parliamentarians from across all four UK parliaments along with other like-minded organisations and individuals to advocate for change. The current opportunities listed in this manifesto provide a chance to take real and practical steps that will offer greater protections and contribute to a safer society for all.**





The Scottish government aim to make Scotland the ‘best place in the world to grow up’ for its 1.1 million children and young people.

# Scotland

## The context

The Scottish government aim to make Scotland the 'best place in the world to grow up' for its 1.1 million<sup>1</sup> children and young people. Over the last decade, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 has been embedded into everyday life.

This has resulted in far-reaching changes in education; children's health and social care and in how children and young people are empowered to be active and confident contributors in Scottish society. Importantly it has also changed how children and young people are kept safe. However, challenges still remain.

**Together we can create  
a safer Scotland.**





## What we're asking for

# Strengthen the safeguards

Significant opportunities exist within Scottish legislation to tighten up safeguards that are already in place to protect children, young people, and adults at risk of harm. We are asking for the Scottish government to improve the level of protection available for vulnerable people by reviewing and updating existing legislation:

- 1 Introduce a statutory definition of **grooming**.
- 2 Close the loopholes that allow convicted **Sex Offenders to change their name** and avoid detection.
- 3 Widen the scope of existing **Position of Trust** legislation.

## Grooming

### The opportunity:

Criminalising grooming offers a much greater level of protection to vulnerable people from those intending to groom. When a person grooms a child intervention is needed so charges may be brought, and the victim protected from further harm.

### The challenge:

Despite current laws in Scotland addressing grooming behaviours, a lack of a recognised legal definition and statutory guidance as to what grooming is, means cases of grooming remain high particularly online, leaving children and young people at risk. Police data shows that in the last ten years the number of online grooming crimes has soared by 60%<sup>2</sup> in Scotland.

### Our recommendations:

- Introduce a full statutory definition of Grooming with accompanying guidance.
- Review existing legislation around the criminalisation of grooming so it protects all minors, not just those under age 13, and covers grooming in person, online or a combination.





# Sex offender name change

## The opportunity:

Laws allowing relevant criminal information about a person to be disclosed and shared in certain situations offer significant protections to children and adults at risk of harm. This includes through schemes such as Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) checks, the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAD), and the Scottish Community Disclosure Scheme.

## The challenge:

The registration and management of convicted sex offenders relies on offenders proactively notifying police and complying with the law. If an offender changes their name and fails to notify police, this presents an increased risk to children and adults as it obscures any conviction information that would normally be shared on a formal disclosure. This legal loophole undermines the effectiveness of safer recruitment practices and means offenders who change their name are unable to be properly monitored within the post-conviction system.

## Our recommendations:

- **Close the legal loophole which allows convicted Sex Offenders to change their name to avoid detection.**
- **Change legislation so that an offender's name is tied to their NHS number and National Insurance number which don't change.**
- **Increase communication between government departments so offenders cannot acquire identity documents such as a passport or driving licence in a new name, without their criminal conviction following them.**
- **Align legislation to other UK nations so that Scottish children are not disproportionately affected by Sex Offender name change.**

# Positions of trust

## The opportunity:

Children and young people receive care or support services from adults in various settings. These adults are in a unique and important relationship with the children they interact with. Existing Positions of Trust legislation gives children and young people a level of protection by acting as a powerful deterrent and holding these adults accountable if they exploit their position towards a child to sexually abuse them. For this to be effective it needs to apply to any role that holds a similar level of trust and responsibility across all sectors and settings.

## The challenge:

The existing scope of Positions of Trust legislation in Scotland is very limited, primarily centered on a list of roles within statutory services. It doesn't currently include other key areas where children engage with adults regularly leaving them without statutory protection across similar settings. Scotland remains an outlier in the UK in its approach to Position of

Trust. However, there is opportunity to extend the definition further to include other settings such as faith and sport.

## Our recommendations:

- **Update Positions of Trust legislation to consider all environments where 16- and 17-year-olds engage with adults who have a position of responsibility over them.**
- **Align legislation with the amended position in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, to incorporate sport and faith roles within Positions of Trust law.**
- **Replace the current list of potential settings and roles by making the nature and context of the relationship between the adult and child the factor which brings a role under the scope of law.**



## What we're asking for

# Better protect victims and survivors

A significant opportunity exists to better protect victims and survivors of abuse in Scotland through the implementation of legislation that would make the reporting of any concerns about abuse or disclosures of abuse mandatory.

**1** Introduce **mandatory reporting legislation.**

## Mandatory reporting

### The opportunity:

Reporting abuse when it happens should be an absolute obligation with no exceptions. Making failure to report child sexual abuse a criminal offence gives greater protection to children and young people who report any concerns or disclose abuse. Evidence from other countries who already have mandatory reporting laws in place shows it works.

### The challenge:

Under current legislative and policy framework in Scotland a general expectation to report exists, but this is not mandatory. In practice this means many cases of child abuse remain unreported leaving children at risk and denying them access to justice.

### Our recommendations:

- Introduce mandatory reporting legislation, following consultation with relevant agencies, organisations, and the public.
- Make the legislation applicable to those in regulated activities and roles that fall within a wider definition of Positions of Trust.





## What we're asking for

# Create safer environments

Significant opportunities exist within Scottish legislation to support the creation of safer environments for all by reducing the risks posed to children and young people online and further incorporating their rights into law:

- 1 Make demonstrable progress and commitment towards online safety via the **Online Safety Act 2023**.
- 2 Make sustained progress towards embedding the principles of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**.

## Online Safety Act 2023

### The opportunity:

The Online Safety Act 2023 is a new set of laws designed to protect children and adults online. It makes social media companies more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms and protects children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content.

### The challenge:

Some of the challenges associated with the Act are that it does not address all online risks and harms

posed to children such as end-to-end encryption, so they remain at risk. Ofcom's regulatory oversight is focused towards medium and large services which may neglect to protect users from risk in smaller services. In some areas the Act lacks 'teeth' in holding social media companies accountable.

### Our recommendations:

- ▶ **Make demonstrable progress and commitment towards enhanced online safety via the Act.**

## UNCRC

### The opportunity:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) places an obligation on governments globally to consider children's rights in everything they do that affects children. The Scottish government has led the way in the UK by embedding UNCRC into legislation through the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill 2021

### The challenge:

There remains more work to be done to encourage ongoing commitment to UNCRC values for all children

in Scotland and to ensure the principles set out are effectively embedded at every level of society so that children feel the benefit and impact in their daily lives.

### Our recommendations:

- ▶ **Make sustained progress towards embedding the principles of the UNCRC through domestic, and statutory means.**



Since the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland's 500,000 children and young people have grown-up living in a peaceful society.







# Northern Ireland

## The context

Since the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland's 500,000 children and young people have grown-up living in a peaceful society. There have been many positive changes to safeguarding over that time including the introduction of the Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act 2014 and the recent Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act 2022. However, many challenges remain. The figures show that 32,000<sup>3</sup> children and young people are living with domestic abuse, 2,310<sup>4</sup> children are on the child protection register and 1 in 5<sup>5</sup> children have experienced some form of abuse or maltreatment.

**Together we can create  
a safer Northern Ireland.**



## What we're asking for

# Strengthen the safeguards

Significant opportunities exist within Northern Ireland to tighten up safeguards that are already in place to protect children, young people, and adults at risk of harm. We are asking for the government to improve the level of protection available for vulnerable people in Northern Ireland by reviewing and updating existing legislation:

- 1** Introduce a statutory definition of **grooming**.
- 2** Close the loopholes that allow convicted **Sex Offenders to change their name** and avoid detection.
- 3** Widen the scope of existing **Position of Trust** legislation.
- 4** Implement vetting and barring reform through **AccessNI**.

## Grooming

### The opportunity:

Criminalising grooming offers a much greater level of protection to vulnerable people from those intending to groom. When a person grooms a child or adult, intervention is needed so charges may be brought, and the victim protected from further harm.

### The challenge:

Although current laws include scenarios where a person over the age of 18 communicates sexually with a person under 16 or arranges to meet a person under 16 following 'sexual grooming', there remains a lack of a clear and recognised legal definition or statutory guidance as to what grooming is, leaving people at risk.

### Our recommendations:

- **Introduce a full statutory definition of grooming with accompanying guidance.**
- **Review existing legislation around the criminalisation of grooming so it protects all minors, not just those under age 13, and covers grooming in person, online, or a combination.**
- **Create an offence of grooming with intention to commit a sexual offence and extend the category of harm to include other forms of abuse, such as financial, emotional, and psychological abuse, which often lead to sexual abuse.**

# Sex offender name change

## The opportunity:

Laws allowing relevant criminal information about a person to be disclosed and shared in certain situations offer significant protections to children and adults at risk of harm. This includes through schemes such as AccessNI and the Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS) Northern Ireland.

## The challenge:

The registration and management of convicted sex offenders relies on offenders proactively notifying police and complying with the law. If an offender changes their name and fails to notify police, this presents an increased risk to children and adults as it obscures any conviction information that would normally be shared on an AccessNI check. This legal loophole undermines the effectiveness of safer recruitment practices and means offenders who change their name are unable to be properly monitored within the post-conviction system.

## Our recommendations:

- **Close the legal loophole which allows convicted Sex Offenders to change name to avoid detection.**
- **Change legislation so that an offender's name is tied to their NHS number and National Insurance number which don't change.**
- **Increase communication between government departments so offenders cannot acquire identity documents such as a passport or driving licence in a new name, without their criminal conviction following them.**
- **Align legislation with other UK nations so that Northern Irish children are not disproportionately affected by Sex Offender name change.**

# Positions of Trust

## The opportunity:

Children and young people receive care or support services from adults in a variety of settings. These adults are in a unique and important relationship with the children they interact with. Existing Positions of Trust legislation gives children and young people a level of protection by acting as a powerful deterrent and holding these adults accountable if they exploit their position towards a child to sexually abuse them. For this to be effective it needs to apply to any role that holds a similar level of trust and responsibility across all sectors and settings.

## The challenge:

The existing scope of Abuse of Positions of Trust legislation in Northern Ireland, despite being extended in 2022 to include faith organisations and community groups, still creates gaps around other similar settings where children engage with adults regularly including non-religious community groups such as Scouts, which creates inequality and leaves young people without statutory protection across similar settings.

## Our recommendations:

- **Update Abuse of Positions of Trust legislation to consider all environments where 16- and 17-year-olds engage with adults who have a position of responsibility over them.**
- **Commit to regularly review the provisions of Article 29A(1) and (2) of The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act 2022 to inform the Department for Justice's decision on when to add or remove activities within the scope of Positions of Trust.**

# AccessNI Reform

## The opportunity:

The vetting and barring service for Northern Ireland – Access NI provides criminal background checks in relation to people working with children, young people and adults at risk in activities that are considered regulated activity. This contributes to the safer recruitment of workers and the protection of vulnerable groups.

## The challenge:

Public perception is that AccessNI checks are mandatory and that all people working in regulated activity have undergone an AccessNI check. This is not the case. In particular there is disparity in safer practice on the island of Ireland; as since 2016, Garda Vetting has been mandatory. As the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales) implements the recommendations from the Bailey Report, this will bring alignment with England and Wales.

## Our recommendations:

- **Make AccessNI a mandatory scheme.**
- **Develop AccessNI in a similar direction to the Disclosure and Barring Service in England and Wales as set out in the Bailey Report.**
- **Align with Garda Vetting to ensure a consistent approach for organisations operating island wide.**
- **Update the regulated activity lists to include all relevant roles where there is a care and support/close contact/personal involvement aspect.**
- **Update the criteria for Enhanced disclosure checks in relation to adults at risk of harm, so it protects them in all areas of life, not just in relation to health and social care.**
- **Update systems to allow a faster turnaround time on applications and a smoother user experience.**







## What we're asking for

# Better protect victims and survivors

Significant opportunities exist to better protect victims and survivors of abuse in Northern Ireland through the development of new legislation and amending existing legislation:

- 1** Introduce a **mandatory reporting legislation**.
- 2** **Repeal section 12** of The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.
- 3** **Remove the defence of reasonable punishment** and allow children full protection under law from physical punishment.

## Mandatory reporting

### The opportunity:

Reporting abuse when it happens should be an absolute obligation with no exceptions. Making failure to report child sexual abuse a criminal offence gives greater protection to children and young people who report any concerns or disclose abuse. Evidence from other countries who already have mandatory reporting laws in place shows it works.

### The challenge:

Current legislation in Northern Ireland creates a clear obligation for someone to report any offence they know of or suspect someone to have committed. Failure to do so can result in prosecution. However, the law is not specific enough to create a strong and irrefutable mandatory reporting duty that is specifically designed to safeguard children and young people from sexual abuse.

### Our recommendations:

- **Introduce mandatory reporting legislation that specifically applies to child protection situations.**
- **Make legislation applicable to those in regulated activities and roles that fall with a wider definition of positions of trust in line with recommendations from The Gillen Review (2019).**

# Suspect anonymity

## The opportunity:

In legal cases involving sexual offences the privacy and well-being of those involved should be protected. This needs to be balanced with an appropriate level of media reporting that allow other victims and survivors to have their voice heard, and be empowered to come forward if they choose.

## The challenge:

The Gillen Review (2019) provides a fair and proportionate framework for protecting the identity of the accused post-charge. However, victims and survivors are often isolated and unaware of other people who have experienced harm from the same person. Without media coverage they would never be aware. New legislation prevents victims and survivors of sexual abuse from naming or sharing any identifying characteristics of their alleged abuser in the public domain in the absence of a criminal charge and for 25 years post-death of the alleged abuser. This poses a risk of harm to others and increases the likelihood of secondary traumatisation to others who may be vulnerable to abuse.

## Our recommendations:

- ▶ **Repeal section 12 of The Justice (Sexual Offences and Trafficking Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 that prevents victims of sexual abuse naming or identifying their alleged abuser in the public domain, pre-criminal charges.**
- ▶ **Consider a fair and proportionate response to press reporting as recommended in the Gillen Review by conducting a full consultation process that includes the survivor voice and the press voice and considers trauma informed practice.**

# Reasonable punishment

## The opportunity:

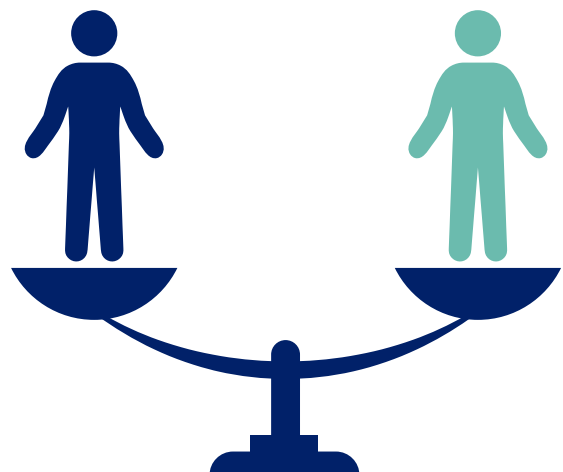
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) state that children have the right to have their best interests considered and to be protected from violence, abuse, and neglect. This would include the physical punishment of children.

## The challenge:

In Northern Ireland adults are protected under law from common assault (and other forms of violence) whilst children are allowed to be subjected to physical punishment, amounting to common assault. Parents can invoke a specific defence, allowing them to physically harm their children.

## Our recommendation:

- ▶ **Remove the defence of reasonable punishment and allow children full protection under law from physical punishment.**





What we're asking for

## Create safer environments

Significant opportunities exist within Northern Ireland to develop legislation that supports the creation of safer environments for all by reducing the risks posed to children and young people online and further incorporating their rights into law:

- 1 Make demonstrable progress and commitment towards online safety via the **Online Safety Act 2023**.
- 2 Make sustained progress towards embedding the principles of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**.

## Online Safety Act 2023

### The opportunity:

The Online Safety Act 2023 is a new set of laws designed to protect children and adults online. It makes social media companies more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms and protects children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content.

### The challenge:

Some of the challenges associated with the Act are that does not address all online risks and harms

posed to children such as end-to-end encryption, so they remain at risk. Ofcom's regulatory oversight is focused towards medium and large services which may neglect to protect users from risk in smaller services. In some areas the Act lacks 'teeth' in holding social media companies accountable.

### Our recommendations:

- **Make demonstrable progress and commitment towards enhanced online safety via the Act.**

## UNCRC

### The opportunity:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) places an obligation on governments globally to consider children's rights in everything they do that affects children.

### The challenge:

The Scottish government has led the way in the UK The Good Friday Agreement and the re-establishment of the NI Assembly provides Northern Ireland with a unique opportunity to create a truly safe and peaceful society for all. Work needs to be

done to encourage a commitment to UNCRC values for all children in Northern Ireland and to ensure the principles set out are effectively embedded at every level of society so that children feel the benefit and impact in their daily lives.

### Our recommendations:

- **Make sustained progress towards embedding the principles of the UNCRC through domestic, and statutory means.**





Wales is home to over 600,000 children and young people, along with 2.4 million adults.



# Wales

## The context

Wales is home to over 600,000 children and young people, along with 2.4 million adults. It is unique in the safeguarding context as the legislation and practice that underpins how people are kept safe, applies to both children and adults. It is the only UK jurisdiction where this happens. The Welsh government has also committed to responding to and implementing the six recommendations from the Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) that relate specifically to Wales. Key pieces of legislation that have transformed the Welsh safeguarding landscape over the last decade include the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and Working Together to Safeguard people. Wales has also led the way amongst the four UK nations in including the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) into its legislation.

**Together we can create  
a safer Wales.**



## What we're asking for

# Strengthen the safeguards

An opportunity exists to tighten the safeguards that are already in place to protect children, young people, and adults at risk of harm. We are asking for the Welsh government to improve the level of protection available for vulnerable people by reviewing and updating existing legislation.

**1** Introduce a **statutory definition of grooming**.

## Grooming

### The opportunity:

Criminalising grooming offers a much greater level of protection to vulnerable people from those intending to groom. When a person grooms a child or adult, intervention is needed so charges may be brought, and the victim protected from further harm.

### The challenge:

Despite current laws in England and Wales that recognize grooming behaviours, the law fails to comprehensively address the problem of online grooming, focussing on the intention to meet a child following grooming, rather than criminalising the preceding grooming behaviour itself, leaving children at risk.

### Our recommendations:

- Introduce a full statutory definition of Grooming with accompanying guidance.
- Review existing legislation around the criminalisation of grooming so it protects all minors, not just those under age 13, and covers grooming in person, online, or a combination.





What we're asking for

## Better protect victims and survivors

Significant opportunities exist to better protect victims and survivors of abuse in Wales through the development of new legislation and monitoring the effectiveness of existing legislation:

- 1 Introduce a **mandatory reporting legislation**.
- 2 Monitor the uptake and implementation of the **corporal punishment ban**.

## Mandatory reporting

### The opportunity:

Reporting abuse when it happens should be an absolute obligation with no exceptions. Making failure to report child sexual abuse a criminal offence gives greater protection to children and young people who report any concerns or disclose abuse. Evidence from other countries who already have mandatory reporting laws in place shows it works.

### The challenge:

Mandatory reporting is an IICSA recommendation that the government are planning to legislate on.

However it appears that following consultation the mandatory reporting remit will be much smaller than is necessary to make this a fit for purpose piece of legislation making only witnessed or disclosed abuse reportable.

### Our recommendations:

- **Broaden the scope of proposed mandatory reporting legislation to include legitimate suspicion of abuse.**

## Corporal punishment ban

### The opportunity:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) state that children have the right to have their best interests considered and to be protected from violence, abuse, and neglect. This includes the physical punishment of children. Since March 2022 physically punishing children has become illegal in Wales.

### The challenge:

The Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2020 abolished the 160-year-old legal defence that allowed physical punishment

of children. This landmark legislation applies to everyone in Wales, including visitors, and covers all forms of physical punishment such as smacking, hitting, slapping, and shaking. However ongoing work is needed to monitor the effective implementation of the ban to ensure it is having the desired impact in the lives of children across Wales.

### Our recommendations:

- **Monitor uptake and implementation of the corporal punishment ban and promotion of public awareness, leading to behaviour and attitude change.**





What we're asking for

## Create safer environments

Significant opportunities exist within Wales to develop new legislation that support the creation of safer environments for all by reducing the risks posed to children and young people from sexual abuse, online safety risk, and further incorporating their rights into law:

- 1 Make demonstrable progress and commitment towards online safety via the **Online Safety Act 2023**.
- 2 Make sustained progress towards embedding the principles of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**.
- 3 Implement the recommendations from the **Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)**.

## Online Safety Act 2023

### The opportunity:

The Online Safety Act 2023 is a new set of laws designed to protect children and adults online. It makes social media companies more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms and protects children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content.

### The challenge:

Some of the challenges associated with the Act are that does not address all online risks and harms

posed to children such as end-to-end encryption, so they remain at risk. Ofcom's regulatory oversight is focused towards medium and large services which may neglect to protect users from risk in smaller services. In some areas the Act lacks 'teeth' in holding social media companies accountable.

### Our recommendations:

- ▶ **Make demonstrable progress and commitment towards enhanced online safety via the Act.**



# UNCRC

## The opportunity:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) places an obligation on governments globally to consider children's rights in everything they do that affects children.

## The challenge:

Building upon the 2006 legislation, work needs to be done to encourage a commitment to UNCRC values for all children in Wales and to ensure the principles set out are effectively embedded at every level of society so that children feel the benefit and impact in their daily lives.

## Our recommendations:

▶ **Make sustained progress towards embedding the principles of the UNCRC through domestic, and statutory means.**

# IICSA Recommendations

## The opportunity:

Children have the right to be protected from all forms of harm and abuse, including Child Sexual Abuse. The report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) published in October 2022 included 20 concluding recommendations about a range of issues including Mandatory Reporting, Redress for victims and survivors, a Cabinet Minister for Children, the introduction of new Child Protection Authorities for England and Wales with investigative powers, and significant changes to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

## The challenge:

Of the 20 recommendations in the IICSA report, six were directed at the Welsh Government. Four of the recommendations were accepted, with the remaining two accepted in principle. In most of these, the Welsh government is already making progress, however ongoing work is required to ensure momentum is maintained to bring about the full implementation of all the recommendations.

## Our recommendations:

▶ **Make sustained progress towards implementing all IICSA recommendations.**





Around 15 million children and young people live in England.





# England

## The context

Around 15 million children and young people live in England. Since the publication of the Bichard Inquiry and the Laming Report in the early 2000's, there has been much forward momentum across the safeguarding landscape in England. In 2014, the Care Act, brought significant changes in adult safeguarding. In late 2022, the final recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse were made. Whilst we have some of the most advanced safeguarding provisions in the world, there is still much to be done to ensure England is a safe place for all.

**Together we can create  
a safer England.**



## What we're asking for

# Strengthen the safeguards

Significant opportunities exist within England and Wales to tighten up safeguards that are already in place to protect children, young people, and adults at risk of harm. We are asking for the government to improve the level of protection available for vulnerable people by reviewing and updating existing legislation.

**1** Introduce a **statutory definition of grooming**.

## Grooming

### The opportunity:

Criminalising grooming offers a much greater level of protection to vulnerable people from those intending to groom. When a person grooms a child or adult, intervention is needed so charges may be brought, and the victim protected from further harm.

### The challenge:

Despite current laws in England and Wales that recognize grooming behaviours, the law fails to comprehensively address the problem of online grooming, focussing on the intention to meet a child following grooming, rather than criminalising the preceding grooming behaviour itself, leaving people at risk.

### Our recommendations:

- Introduce a full statutory definition of Grooming with accompanying guidance.
- Review existing legislation around the criminalisation of grooming so it protects all minors, not just those under age 13, and covers grooming in person, online, or a combination.





## What we're asking for

# Better protect victims and survivors

Significant opportunities exist to better protect children and the victims and survivors of abuse in England:

- 1 Introduce **mandatory reporting legislation**.
- 2 Remove the defence of **reasonable chastisement** and allow children full protection under law from physical punishment.

## Mandatory reporting

### The opportunity:

Reporting abuse when it happens should be an absolute obligation with no exceptions. Making failure to report child sexual abuse a criminal offence gives greater protection to children and young people who report any concerns or disclose abuse. Evidence from other countries who already have mandatory reporting laws in place shows it works.

### The challenge:

Mandatory reporting is an IICSA recommendation that the UK government are planning to legislate on,

however it appears that the mandatory reporting remit will be much smaller than is necessary to make this a fit for purpose piece of legislation making only witnessed or disclosed abuse reportable.

### Our recommendations:

- **Broaden the scope of proposed mandatory reporting legislation to include legitimate suspicion of abuse.**

## Reasonable chastisement

### The opportunity:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) state that children have the right to have their best interests considered and to be protected from violence, abuse and neglect. This would include the physical punishment of children.

### The challenge:

In England (and Northern Ireland) adults are protected under law from common assault (and other forms of violence) whilst children are allowed to be subjected to

physical punishment, amounting to common assault. Parents can invoke a specific defence, allowing them to physically harm their children. Both Scotland and Wales have already criminalised physical punishment of children.

### Our recommendations:

- **Remove the defence of reasonable chastisement and allow children full protection under law from physical punishment.**





What we're asking for

# Create safer environments

Significant opportunities exist within England and Wales to develop new legislation that support the creation of safer environments for all by reducing the risks posed to children and young people from sexual abuse, online safety risk, and further incorporating their rights into law:

- 1 Make demonstrable progress and commitment towards online safety via the **Online Safety Act 2023**.
- 2 Make sustained progress towards embedding the principles of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**.
- 3 Implement the recommendations from the **Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)**.

## Online Safety Act 2023

### The opportunity:

The Online Safety Act 2023 is a new set of laws designed to protect children and adults online. It makes social media companies more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms and protects children from accessing harmful and age-inappropriate content.

### The challenge:

Some of the challenges associated with the Act are that does not address all online risks and harms posed to children such as end-to-end encryption, so they remain at risk. Ofcom's regulatory oversight is focused towards medium and large services which may neglect to protect users from risk in smaller services. In some areas the Act lacks 'teeth' in holding social media companies accountable.

### Our recommendations:

- ▶ **Make demonstrable progress and commitment towards enhanced online safety via the Act.**



# UNCRC

## The opportunity:

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) places an obligation on governments globally to consider children's rights in everything they do that affects children.

## The challenge:

England has signed up to the UNCRC (as part of the UK), but has yet to progress this within English legislation and policy. Work needs to be done to encourage a commitment to UNCRC values for all

children in England and Wales and to ensure the principles set out are effectively embedded at every level of society so that children feel the benefit and impact in their daily lives.

## Our recommendations:

► **Make sustained progress towards embedding the principles of the UNCRC through domestic, and statutory means.**

# IICSA Recommendations

## The opportunity:

Children have the right to be protected from all forms of harm and abuse, including Child Sexual Abuse. The report of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) published in October 2022 included 20 concluding recommendations about a range of issues including mandatory reporting, redress for victims and survivors, a Cabinet Minister for Children, the introduction of new Child Protection Authorities for England with investigative powers, and significant changes to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

## The challenge:

In May 2023 the government issued its response to the recommendations contained in the IICSA report. Despite accepting the issues, it did not accept the

recommendations themselves, including the creation of a Child Protection Authority for England, and the creation of a cabinet-level ministerial position for children. What was proposed instead was a number of amendments to arrangements that already exist and the proposal of more consultations to come. With the exception of Mandatory Reporting, little progress has been made following the recommendations of the Inquiry leaving the risks identified unresolved.

## Our recommendations:

► **Make sustained progress towards implementing all IICSA recommendations.**



# Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable

Proverbs 31:8 (CEB)

If you have any questions about  
our Manifesto or would like to  
work with us to endorse any of our  
recommendations, please contact us.

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