

Thousands of children abused in their own homes are not being protected by local authorities, damning NSPCC report warns

- **More than half a million children are abused or neglected at home each year**
- **But charity claims just one in nine are protected by local authorities**

By Anthony Bond

Hundreds of thousands of children abused in their own homes are slipping through the net as local authorities are unable to protect them, a children's charity has warned today.

More than half a million children are abused or neglected at home each year - but just one in nine are protected by local authorities, the NSPCC said.

Services to protect children are improving but the charity warns they will only ever reach a fraction of the children who are abused.

The scale of the problem is a key finding in the UK's first national child abuse tracker How Safe Are Our Children launched by the NSPCC today.

Lisa Harker, NSPCC head of strategy and one author of the report, said: 'As a nation we spend more than £6 billion every year on services for children and families.

'We need to know if our efforts to prevent abuse and protect children are working.

'Child protection services are working in overdrive and our report shows the UK is making progress in some areas. But the hidden extent of child abuse and neglect revealed in this report is a national scandal.

'Since Baby Peter, social workers and other professionals are working harder and harder to reduce the harm caused by abuse and neglect.

'They are taking more referrals, making more assessments, providing more services and putting more children in care.

'When we discover abuse, we must do everything we can to protect children from further harm and help them recover.

'But it's vital to prevent abuse from happening to so many children in the first place. We need to shift policy across the UK towards early intervention - and set a new course that can stop cruelty blighting so many children's lives.' Its new report reveals that for every child subject to a protection plan, or on child protection registers, another eight have suffered recent maltreatment.

The NSPCC estimates that 520,000 children were maltreated by a parent or guardian in the UK in 2011 but only 58,000 became the subject of child protection plans in that year.

The charity estimates it would cost up to £500 million every year to provide protection plans to just a quarter of these 'hidden' children.

Preventative services which work with struggling parents before, or as soon as, issues arise can stop the need for costly protection measures later, the NSPCC said.

A Department for Education spokeswoman said: 'There is nothing more important than protecting children from harm. We agree that we need to intervene early to help children at risk of abuse or neglect.

'That is why we have sharpened the statutory guidance to focus far more on early help, and to clarify what all professionals must do to support families earlier - before formal intervention is needed. 'We are also improving the skills of social workers and cutting red tape so they can get on with the job of protecting vulnerable children. We are clear that where children are suffering abuse or neglect, they should be taken into care more quickly.'