

***'AN INSPECTION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT BODIES'
RESPONSE TO GROUP-BASED CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN ENGLAND AND WALES'***

PUBLISHED BY HMICFRS ON 8TH DECEMBER 2023

AVON & SOMERSET PCC RESPONSE DATED 2ND FEBRUARY 2024

The first area of focus in my Police and Crime Plan is *vulnerable children and adults*. I think everybody can agree that protecting children is one of the most important things the police do. However, the police cannot achieve this alone and must work with other agencies; particularly important are the partnerships with local authorities. Protecting children will improve lives, improve the community and improve our future.

I welcome the findings from this report: there are four recommendations and one area for improvement for Chief Constables. These are set out below with the initial response to these after each of them.

There are various issues with local authorities sharing data with the police and I will continue to support the police in working with other organisations to improve this position.

It should be noted that I have a legal duty to respond to inspection reports within eight weeks of their publication. However, you will see the Constabulary have many more months to fully complete these recommendations: that's why the responses are still a work in progress. With the support of my office, I oversee recommendations from the inspectorate on a continual basis to help ensure they are completed and will see the results of the audits mentioned.

Recommendation 2

By 31 December 2024, all chief constables should make sure that their forces have problem profiles for child sexual exploitation, each of which should include an assessment of the nature and extent of group-based child sexual exploitation. This should include relevant data from local partner agencies and should be updated frequently, at least annually.

Response

The Constabulary will be producing a new problem profile which they are expecting to complete in the Spring of 2024. However, this will be unlikely to include data from partner agencies this time due to several issues. The Constabulary will continue to work with its partner agencies to enable subsequent problem profiles to be informed by police and partner data.

Recommendation 4

By 31 December 2024, all chief constables and the relevant business user groups for police record management systems should make sure there are sufficient measures in place to identify group-based child sexual exploitation.

Response

The current recording in Avon and Somerset does not allow for the quick and easy identification of group-based offending. The Constabulary are exploring the options available on Niche (the record management system) to be able to capture this information.

Recommendation 8

By 30 June 2024, all chief constables of forces that are yet to receive the Hydrant Programme's continuing professional development (CPD) offer should arrange it.

Response

The Superintendent lead for crimes against children had already met with the Hydrant Programme's senior Child Sexual Exploitation leads to discuss the Constabulary's current practices and processes.

A member of the Constabulary's specialist child exploitation team will now review the Hydrant Programme's offer and how this fits with their current training.

Recommendation 9

With immediate effect, all chief constables should take effective steps to eradicate victim-blaming language in their forces.

Response

Victim-blaming language is something that has been identified and worked on in terms of adult rape and serious sexual offences through the Soteria/Bluestone model that was implemented in 2021.

The Constabulary provide training to officers and staff which includes inputs from the specialist child exploitation team and the child protection team and these inputs cover victim-blaming language.

The Children's Society "Appropriate Language in Relation to Child Exploitation" guidance for professionals document has been circulated to a large number of officers and staff and is published on the Constabulary's intranet.

In the recent Child Protection inspection HMICFRS "*found some evidence of officers using victim-blaming language*" in Avon and Somerset. The informal feedback was that while the work that has taken place is having effect, efforts to eradicate victim-blaming language should continue.

Area of improvement

All chief constables should work with their statutory safeguarding partners to review, promote and make sure that relevant group-based child sexual exploitation disruption and prevention initiatives are implemented effectively in their forces.

This should include consideration of options such as the advice given in the Home Office disruption toolkit and an Operation Makesafe (a national police initiative to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation in the business community) type of approach.

Response

The Constabulary has already implemented Operation Makesafe in terms of hotels and taxis. They write to hotels offering managers and staff free training sessions. They also make unannounced visits to hotels to check their child safeguarding practices using test bookings with plain clothed officers and volunteer cadets. At the time of making unannounced visits, managers are again offered free training sessions for their staff and are provided with awareness raising booklets and cards to issue to their staff.

In relation to taxis the Constabulary works with the local authority licencing departments, with training for drivers and taxi company staff organised by the local authority and delivered by either the Constabulary's Child Exploitation Prevention Officer or local authority trainer. They have also used plain clothed officers and volunteer cadets to carry out a number of test bookings with local taxi firms, as children might do if they were being exploited, to see how the taxis respond to this.

The Constabulary have a number of planned activities to improve how they work internally including the use of data, processes, tasking and training.

The Constabulary also plan to work with safeguarding partners to research and evaluate the benefits of introducing a multi-agency meeting specifically for child exploitation (MACE).

A key component of successfully working with partners is the ability to share data between agencies in order to better understand risk and identify the children in need of protection. However, this is particularly challenging for a number of reasons so the system will rely largely on police data to identify children at heightened risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE).

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