

‘Feeling heard’: partner agencies working together to make a difference for children with mental ill health

This inspections covered by this report were joint targeted area inspections (JTAI) led by Ofsted in partnership with HMICFRS, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation and the Care Quality Commission, into how local partnerships and services are responding to children and their families when children are living with mental ill-health. Six local authority areas were inspected between September 2019 and February 2020, including Plymouth. The report was published on 9th December 2020 and a response is due by 3rd February 2021.

The full report can be viewed here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942529/JTAI - partner agencies and children with mental ill health.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942529/JTAI_-_partner_agencies_and_children_with_mental_ill_health.pdf)

It should also be noted that the ‘Joint targeted area inspection of the multi-agency response to children’s mental health in Plymouth’ report was published separately in January 2020, and that the force continues to contribute towards a partnership action plan which addresses the issues raised.

Key findings

This report does not make recommendations but highlights a number of key findings in its executive summary. Whilst all findings will be of interest to the force as part of their partnership work, only one of these relates directly police forces:

Police forces need to share good practice to drive improvements across areas so that all children get the response and care that they need.

Some police forces have developed training and support for their frontline officers so that they are better equipped to recognise and help children with mental ill health. This progress has enabled professionals to identify risks to these children early. Effective joint working has meant that information is shared across agencies and that children are supported to get the help that they needed. However, this response is not consistent across all areas. Some responses from police did not take account of the vulnerability of children with mental ill health. We saw too many examples of children who were kept in custody overnight and who were not helped to get the support that they needed.

Chief Constable’s response

The Chief Constable has chosen not to provide an additional response in this instance, given that there is already a partnership action plan in place which continues to address and monitor progress on the areas relevant to Devon and Cornwall Police, as highlighted in Plymouth’s joint targeted area inspection report.

Police and Crime Commissioner’s response

The Commissioner welcomes this report and its review of partnership approaches to supporting children with mental ill health. The report recognises the importance of early recognition of children’s mental health needs across all agencies, and frontline police officers have a key part to play in this.

The Commissioner says:

“Protecting the vulnerable is a key priority in my Police and Crime Plan and children with mental ill health are some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

I am pleased to see that many police forces across the Country are training and supporting their frontline staff to recognise the signs of mental ill health in children they come into contact with, and that effective partnership working is providing appropriate access to mental health support for those in need.

I am assured that the Chief Constable continues to work with our partners to address the issues highlighted through Plymouth’s joint targeted area inspection and that children with mental ill health will continue to be provided with the right support across the Peninsula.”