

National Child Protection Inspections 2019 Thematic Report

This report distils the findings of a programme of inspections into child protection arrangements since 2014. The report aims to build on the findings of the previous reports by exploring the key themes identified by the evidence and considers the ways in which the police service, its safeguarding partners and the government need to adapt and respond in order to meet the challenges they face

The report was published on 27th February 2020 and makes six recommendations

The full report can be viewed here:

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/national-child-protection-inspections-2019-thematic-report.pdf>

Key findings

The role of leaders and leadership

- Leadership, management and governance
- Innovative work the police are doing to protect children

The recognition of risk and vulnerability

- Where the risk is immediate and obvious forces usually respond well, but complex or less obvious risks can be missed
- Police now understand that those children who go missing are at increased risk of exploitation, but responses still require improvement

The response to risk and vulnerability

- Opportunities for the police and their partners to intervene at an earlier stage are recognised
- The response to criminal exploitation is evolving but too many exploited children are criminalised

Protecting children from those who pose a risk to them

- Approaches to managing risks to children posed by others are inconsistent

The detention of children in police custody

- Police increasingly recognise the vulnerability of children in custody but too many are still detained unnecessarily



Police and Crime Commissioner's response

I have consulted with the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall Police and am pleased to provide the following response to the National Child Protection Inspections 2019 Thematic Report.

We welcome the report and its findings which are based on the learning gathered from 18 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) child protection inspections. 1 of those inspections was of Devon and Cornwall Police and the findings published in May 2015. The report also reflects upon 21 reviews of progress conducted since the previous national thematic report in 2015.

I believe that every child has the right to live a life that is free from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation and that no child should ever have to live in fear. All of our children deserve the opportunity to grow up in safe environment, where they are cared for and protected from harm.

As HMICFRS have recently recognised in our local PEEL Police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy 2018/19 inspection report www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/peel-assessment-2018-19-devon-and-cornwall.pdf, Devon and Cornwall Police continues to work well with other organisations to safeguard vulnerable people. Four multi-agency safeguarding hubs (MASHs) operate across the force area and they work to protect vulnerable children. Referrals are made to the MASH by police and other organisations. A central safeguarding team co-ordinates these referrals. The inspectorate visited MASHs in Devon and Cornwall ahead of our inspection and found good information sharing, partnership working and co-ordinated safeguarding work.

I was pleased to read within the report that the inspectorate was consistently pleased to find that in every force they have returned to after a previous inspection there had been some measure of progress in achieving better results for children who were at risk of harm. As safeguarding children is everybody's responsibility, I was also delighted that this report recognises the contribution of, and in some cases, challenges faced by, the diverse range of agencies which must work together to protect children from harm.

However, the report also recognises and reminds us of the challenges all Forces and our partner organisations currently face. Forces are working within a landscape of competing and complex demands and, at the time of writing this report, a pandemic

which is requiring all of us to navigate crime and its causes in new and unfamiliar ways. This creates potential risks and we must ensure that protecting children remains a tangible priority at this time and moving forwards.

As such it is important now more than ever for Forces to be able to clearly articulate with partner organisations but also to the public about what they are trying to achieve, how, and by when. It is my view that generally goals are much easier to reach when:

- all interested parties have agreed and can state in plain English what they are trying to achieve together;
- specific action is agreed, resourced and delivered; and
- there is some way to measure and evidence success and continuously improve

Therefore I understand that the Force is in the process of creating a child centre policing strategy and whilst I appreciate this will provide the Force with a strategic direction, I would also expect this work to be fully informed by the diverse range of stakeholders and partners that also work to protect children, and support them to recover from trauma. This work will enable a focus for activity and empower relevant organisations to visualise and understand more clearly how and where they can support the police (and vice versa) to better safeguard children within Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. It may also help generate additional insight to support strategic commissioning and co-commissioning discussions in relation to services for children.

In addition to this request my office will maintain oversight and scrutiny of the Chief Constable's progress towards the recommendations within the report, namely that all chief constables will:

- take steps to reduce the unnecessary criminalisation of children
- review performance management and quality assurance approaches to ensure that assessments of the nature and quality of decision making are routinely made
- take steps to identify and implement good practice and the learning highlighted from these programmes

Alison Hernandez
Police and Crime Commissioner
Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly