

The Multi-Agency Response to Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment

This report draws together findings from six joint targeted area inspections, focusing on the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in the family environment. This report summarises findings from our joint targeted area inspections of ‘the multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in the family environment’, which took place between September 2018 and May 2019.

The findings in this report consider the extent to which children’s social care, health professionals, youth offending services, the police and probation officers effectively work together to safeguard children who are subject to, or at risk of, sexual abuse in the family environment.

Sexual abuse in the family environment may be perpetrated by a family member (including extended family) or by a person close to, or known to, the family, such as a neighbour, family friend, partner of a parent or another trusted adult. Children under the age of 18 may also sexually abuse others within the family environment.

The report calls on professionals to give sexual abuse a higher priority in local areas, through improved training and awareness-raising of the problem. More needs to be done to prevent the sexual abuse of children in the family environment and when it does happen, agencies must work better to protect and support victims and families.

The inspections were carried out between September 2018 and May 2019 in six local authorities including Cornwall.

The report was published on 4th February 2020. There are no recommendations.

The full report can be viewed here

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/862454/Multi_agency_response_to_child_sexual_abuse_in_the_family_environment_joint_targeted_area_inspections_JTAs.pdf

Police and Crime Commissioner’s response

I welcome the report ‘The multi-agency response to child sexual abuse in the family environment’ published in February 2020.

This activity focused on bringing together *all* of the findings from six Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs), which were completed in Bracknell Forest, Cornwall, Derby City, Islington, Shropshire and York by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted.



Sexual abuse in the family environment may be perpetrated by a family member, including a child or adult sibling, or by a person close to, or known to, the family. The purpose of these joint inspections was to consider the extent to which, in the local authorities inspected, children's social care, health professionals, youth offending services, the police and probation officers were effective in safeguarding children from this devastating crime.

All of these inspections took place between September 2018 and May 2019. The review in Cornwall took place in October 2018 and I have previously commented on that specifically (my response can be viewed on my office's website at www.devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/information-hub/response-to-hmic-consultations/hmic-responses-may-2016-onwards).

In my discussions with the Chief Constable about this particular report, we agree that building on the inspection in Cornwall in 2018, it is beneficial to consider the cumulative learning from a further 5 JTAs.

This report contains a number of findings, all of which are important, and I will work with the Chief Constable to ensure that any local relevant Force strategies and plans are cognisant of them.

In direct response to this report I will be requesting that the Chief Constable considers how Devon and Cornwall Police could further raise awareness of sexual abuse within the family environment using its own communication strategy. I will also be interested to see how the report's findings lead to demonstrable change through the Force's prevention strategy and will monitor that for governance and accountability purposes through my Joint Leadership Board.

Given the extraordinary value of partnership working and information sharing across a broad spectrum of agencies which is needed to prevent and respond to this type of abuse, based on this report I am also interested for the Chief Constable to explore what further role the Force could potentially take in a multi-agency approach to training in this area.

Another key finding of particular interest in the report relates to 'over-optimism that women can police their own homes, and this is something I have passed for consideration to my Criminal Justice, Commissioning and Partnerships Manager. As it is both my responsibility but also my privilege to commission over £3.6 million of services which provide direct support to those who have experienced crime in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, I wish to ensure that this finding in particular forms part of our organisational thinking when commissioning services for women.

The findings within this report in relation to medical treatment for children is stark. Any child who has experienced sexual abuse must have access to the physical as well as emotional help and support they need. During 2020 I will explore this finding further with my colleagues in both the police and health services specifically to ensure that our local response is robust and will ensure that any learning identified from those conversations informs my future commissioning.

I will also ensure that the overall learning from this report is captured as appropriate within my next commissioning strategy and I have added it to the evidence base which my organisation is preparing as the foundation for the next police and crime plan for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

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