

## Cheshire PCCs Response to His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Police and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspections

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|----------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Title of Inspection</b>       | An inspection of how well the police and National Crime Agency tackle the online sexual abuse and exploitation of children. |   |
| <b>Date Inspection Published</b> | 5 <sup>th</sup> April 2023  |   |
| <b>Type of Inspection</b>        | Thematic  |   |
| <b>Recommendations</b>           | National  | x |
|                                  | Local   |   |
|                                  | Cheshire referenced in report   |   |

### Report Summary:

The report notes that there is a clear commitment from national leaders in law enforcement bodies to tackle the growing problem of online sexual abuse and exploitation of children, with existing governance structures at a national level providing good oversight and improvement.

It recognises that the National Crime Agency has an important leadership role, with a good understanding of the national demand levels and the risks to children, but with the growing amount of child sexual abuse material available online there is a need for legislative intervention. The Online Safety Bill is a critical opportunity to address this.

It is said that to achieve consistently good practice at regional and force level, the police’s response also needs improvements. Senior leaders need better processes to understand their local performance, the scale and nature of the demand in their force area, and the risks to children. Officers and staff need clearer guidance, supervision and training so they can meet nationally agreed minimum standards.

Forces should work more collaboratively with their statutory safeguarding partners and agree joint plans to protect children to prevent them from becoming victims. And they should make sure children who do become victims are offered support.

The report makes a series of recommendations aimed at improving the consistency of the police’s approach and the timeliness of investigations, reducing the availability of child sexual abuse (CSA) material, and getting better outcomes for children.

### **Constabulary Response**

Cheshire Constabulary is committed to working with all partners and non-government organisations to deliver an effective strategic and operational response to online CSA. Over the last 18 months and in response to PEEL inspection and National Child Protection Inspection reports, there has been significant investments into the Online Child Abuse Investigation Team (OCAIT), having reviewed and improved processes for cases awaiting allocation.

Multi-agency risk assessment meetings were established in February 2023 and are supported by appropriate information sharing agreements. Completion of multi-agency discussions monitored through a series of daily and weekly “grip” meetings.


The rollout of our next Child Protection Continuous Professional Development event took place on the 17 May 2023, which sees all officers and frontline staff receive face-to-face training in all aspects of child abuse.

A *Managing Offenders Threat Management Group* and a *Managing Offenders Board* has been established to ensure that progress is being made with the recommendations made in this report and that the constabulary continues to effectively manage the risk posed by online child abuse offenders. The new governance structure is supported by a robust performance framework which includes weekly review of caseloads, allocation rates and the timely processing of intelligence submissions.

### **Commissioner’s Response**

I have made a significant commitment to protecting children and young people in my Police and Crime Plan, recognising they are some of the most vulnerable people in society. I work closely with the Cheshire’s Youth Commission to establish strong links between young people and police which is essential in building trust and ensuring all reports of abuse are reported.

To support young people further, I commission ‘Got Your Back’ which is a free and confidential service for under 18s who are victims of crime, offering support which includes serious offences such as online CSA. Furthermore, I have ensured my website includes links to ThinkUKnow materials in the “*Support for Victims*” section where victims can get the appropriate help and advice.



**John Dwyer**

**Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire**

#### *Recommendation 9*

By 31 October 2023, chief constables and police and crime commissioners should make sure their commissioned services for children, and the process for referring them for support or therapeutic services, are available for children affected by online sexual abuse and exploitation.

*Recommendation 11*

By 31 July 2023, chief constables and police and crime commissioners should review the advice they publish, and, if necessary, revise it, to make sure it is consistent with the National Crime Agency's [ThinkUKnow \(Child Exploitation and Online Protection\)](#) material.