

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

<b>Title of Inspection</b>	HMICFRS Inspection of the Effectiveness of the Response to Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation in England and Wales	
<b>Date Inspection Published</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> December 2023	
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	National Thematic	
<b>Recommendations</b>	National	Y
	Cheshire Specific	N

### Report Summary:

The police has made attempts in the past to enhance its response to child sexual exploitation (CSE), including strategic assessments of child protection issues, but progress has been slow.

The National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC) has combined the responsibility for group-based exploitation into the child protection portfolio, with the aim of better national coordination.

An accurate picture of group-based child sexual exploitation is not available due to the inconsistent methodologies used by forces and Regional Organised Crime Units in data collection and analysis, as well as the unreliability of the data gathering process. A lack of a common definition for group-based child sexual exploitation has exacerbated these concerns, and incomplete recording practices hinder evidence-based conclusions and responses to group-based child sexual exploitation, particularly in relation to ethnicity.

Few forces have problem profiles focussing on group-based child sexual exploitation. The investigation showed that the quality of criminal investigations varies, with specialist officers demonstrating better outcomes and that some forces struggle to identify and prioritize group-based cases within broader investigations.

While effort is made to avoid criminalising exploited children, there was examples of the use of victim blaming language in half of the forces inspected and found over a dozen examples in case file records. This indicating a lack of understanding of children's vulnerability. Forces need to address cultural issues and enhance sensitivity in handling such cases.

## **Recommendations:**

### **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.

### **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.

### **Recommendation 8**

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

### **Recommendation 9**

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

**AFI 1** - 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.

## **Constabulary Response:**

The Constabulary will ensure that an assessment of the extent and nature of group based CSE is incorporated into our child protection tactical assessments. The Constabulary has appointed a Detective Chief Superintendent to lead on this recommendation and have reviewed and improved the use of flags in Niche as well as the records management system. Should any additional changes be required considering this recommendation, representations will be made to regional and national Niche working groups.

An initial approach has been made to the national Hydrant team (non-recent childhood sexual abuse) in order to establish what additional professional development support might be available.

The Constabulary is confident that they already comply with the recommendation appertaining to victim blaming, but it is currently under review by the Protecting Vulnerable People Department.

There is existing compliance with the AFI, and the Constabulary is continuing to work with partners to disrupt criminal gangs linked to CSE and to prevent harm to victims and potential victims of CSE, this includes raising awareness in the business community.

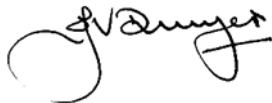
**Commissioner's Response:**

Children and young people are some of the most vulnerable people in society. They are most at risk of victimisation, particularly when the crime involves coercion or manipulation such as child sexual exploitation or county lines drug activity.

I have made significant mention of protecting children and young people in my Police and Crime Plan, and to divert vulnerable people away from CSE I have commissioned services such as Queensberry AP. They offer education and interventions to promote healthy behaviours and positive activities to reduce the risk of associating with people with the potential to cause them harm.

When I commissioned the services of Independent Sexual Violence Advocates (ISVAs), I ensured that there was capability to support child victims. All ISVAs have a 'bolt on' to their training to support victims as young as 13, along with one specialist child ISVA.

Whilst support services are necessary, I want to move to a position where CSE, group or otherwise becomes a thing of the past. We are a long way from this ambition with a lot more work to do. I will ensure the Constabulary work hard to address the recommendations in the report, and reassuringly as an overarching indication to the commitment given in Cheshire is that it has one of the best outcome rates for CSE (albeit not specific to group offences).



**John Dwyer**

**Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire**