



RESPONSE OF DAVID KEANE, POLICE & CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR CHESHIRE

I welcome Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) National Child Protection Inspections 2019 Thematic Report that was published 27 February 2020. The report provides an overview of the 17 child protection inspections of individual forces and the 21 reviews of forces to assess their progress against recommendations since the first HMICFRS thematic report that was published in 2015. Although Cheshire Constabulary is yet to be inspected, the findings and learning available from this national thematic report is invaluable and will ensure greater protection for children, in particular vulnerable children, both nationally and within local communities across Cheshire.

I reiterate the recognition of HMICFRS in the recent PEEL spotlight report that forces continue to provide services to the public under the joint pressures of rising demand and falling resources. Nevertheless, I am pleased that HMICFRS continue to see an unambiguous commitment from police leaders, officers and staff in relation to the protection of children. In addition, HMICFRS has reported that signs of vulnerability are more effectively recognised, the assessment of risk is generally better and that partnership working has matured with the quality of multi-agency planning and decision making improving. As a result, there continues to be improvements in the outcomes for some, though not all, of the most vulnerable children in society.

I applaud the Constabulary's ongoing commitment to focus upon threat, harm, risk and vulnerability which, as a result, has increased the extent to which the Constabulary has a good understanding of the nature and scale of vulnerability across Cheshire. That said, I fully agree with the suggestion of HMICFRS that in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for children, leaders in all agencies need to come together to form clear local strategies to reduce risk and protect children at risk from abuse and exploitation. I have discussed the thematic report with the Chief Constable and requested that the findings of this thematic report are discussed by the safeguarding partnerships in each of the local authority areas across Cheshire. With the Chief Constable being one of the three safeguarding partners, the Constabulary is best placed to support the coordinated approach to protecting children in our local communities. The report also highlights numerous examples of innovative work from across the country, some of which could be replicated within Cheshire.

Given the ongoing vulnerability of children within our local communities either experiencing or at risk of child exploitation due to, for example, county lines, I also continue to welcome the joint targeted area inspections (JTAI) and the deep dive focus on this vulnerable group of children who are known to be in this situation of concern. To date, there have been two JTAI inspections within Cheshire, specifically within Cheshire West and Chester (report published in November 2017) and in Halton (report published in August 2019). I would encourage further joint targeted area inspections within Cheshire East and Warrington to be undertaken in due course to provide additional recommendations and/or areas for improvement where applicable.

I note that the report highlights children continue to be detained in police custody unnecessarily and I would suggest that this in itself can be an adverse childhood experience (ACE) for some children, particularly those with complex needs. Although Cheshire Constabulary continues its efforts to reduce time within custody, in particular overnight detentions, this is impacted upon the availability of appropriate alternative accommodation, a responsibility of local authorities. I have again discussed the provision of both alternative accommodation and secure accommodation within Cheshire and, in agreement with the Chief Constable, we will continue to raise the issue with partners wherever possible.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Keane', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Keane
Police & Crime Commissioner
17 April 2020