



Dan Price
Cheshire
Police & Crime
Commissioner

Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner's response to the report on 'The policing response of online child sexual abuse and the management of registered sex offenders' (HMICFRS)

Title of inspection: The policing response to the investigation of online child sexual abuse and the management of registered sex offenders

Published on: 15 April 2026

Inspection types: Child protection, Crime investigation, Offender management, PEEL and Spotlight

Recommendations: National

Report summary

This HMICFRS report reviews police responses to online child sexual abuse (OCSAE) and the management of registered sex offenders across England and Wales. It highlights rapidly increasing demand, with significant rises in abuse referrals and offender numbers, placing growing pressure on specialist police teams.

While many forces have improved governance and organisational structures, the report identifies major ongoing challenges. These include insufficient staffing, high caseloads, inconsistent risk assessment, and serious delays in digital forensic examinations which can prolong investigations and increase risk to victims. Training is also inconsistent with no standard national courses for these specialist roles.

Risk management is a key concern. Some forces do not consistently use arrest or bail, fail to monitor suspects effectively or reassess risks during long investigations. Similarly, in managing registered sex offenders, inconsistent practices, poor data use and high workloads limit effective supervision and increase the potential for reoffending.

The report makes 16 recommendations focused on improving staffing, training, and use of technology, strengthening governance and data systems and enhancing partnership working with agencies such as probation and social care. It also emphasises the need for better well-being support for officers in these high-risk roles. Overall, the report calls for stronger national coordination and investment to improve safeguarding and protect vulnerable children.

Recommendations from Inspectors and Constabulary response



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Description	Update
<p>Recommendation 1 By 31 October 2026, forces should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review existing practices to make sure they use the Kent internet risk assessment tool and the prioritisation tool to prioritise referrals for all children and adult suspects; • review their procedures to make sure there is regular assessment of intelligence and risk for online child sexual abuse and exploitation suspects both prior to enforcement and throughout the lifecycle of the investigation; and • make sure investigations allocated outside online child sexual abuse and exploitation teams remain under the team’s management oversight, including a central escalation policy. 	<p>KIRAT and the associated prioritisation frameworks are in place for all relevant referrals, intelligence and risk are reviewed throughout investigations, and cases managed outside the specialist team remain subject to force oversight and central escalation arrangements.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2 By 30 April 2027, forces should review existing staffing levels in online child sexual abuse and exploitation teams to make sure that they have enough officers and staff to manage demand effectively and that workloads are manageable.</p>	<p>We are reviewing staffing in the Online Child Abuse Investigation Team on an ongoing basis to make sure it matches demand and that workloads are manageable.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4 By 31 October 2026, forces should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review their online child sexual abuse procedures and make sure that arrest and bail is considered and recorded for all suspects; and • make sure that when online child sexual abuse suspects are on bail, conditions are proactively checked at least once per applicable bail period. 	<p>Established processes within the Online Child Abuse Investigation Team provide for arrest and bail to be considered and recorded for suspects, and for bail conditions to be proactively checked and documented where applicable.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5 By 30 April 2027, forces should make sure that third-party provision is in place to support families of online child sexual abuse suspects and that leaflets with contact details of support organisations are available.</p>	<p>Third-party support and family information leaflets already in place and embedded in existing practice.</p>



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Recommendation 6

By 30 October 2026, forces should:

- review their operating models and governance frameworks to make sure they have a consistent approach to managing registered sex offenders across all teams, including use of the Violent and Sex Offender Register in line with Home Office standards; and
- review the data they collect, how they collect it and how it is presented and make sure that it represents what is on the Violent and Sex Offender Register to accurately assess and manage the risk of registered sex offenders.

We have self-certified this recommendation as complete, having implemented consistent governance, oversight and data processes across MOSOVO to ensure registered sex offenders are managed in line with Home Office ViSOR standards and that performance information accurately reflects the position recorded on ViSOR.

Recommendation 8

By 31 October 2026, forces should:

- use previous demand trends and review predicted demand for management of sexual offenders and violent offenders teams for five years to make sure that they have enough offender managers and supervisors to manage this;
- make sure that management of sexual offenders and violent offenders team abstractions are recorded, reviewed, don't happen on a regular basis and don't have a negative effect on workload completion;
- make sure that management of sexual offenders and violent offenders teams have manageable numbers of outstanding active risk management systems assessments, risk management plans and visits and that these are assessed by both risk level and how overdue they are; and
- make sure that supervisors are completing reviews of active risk management systems assessments, risk management plans and visits promptly and within one month.

Cheshire Constabulary has established arrangements to forecast demand, record abstractions, monitor outstanding ARMS activity, and ensure supervisory oversight.





Recommendation 10

By 31 October 2026, forces should make sure that:

- home visits are unannounced and carried out in pairs to comply with the College of Policing authorised professional practice for the management of sexual offenders and violent offenders;
- visits that don't comply with the authorised professional practice for the management of sexual offenders and violent offenders are authorised, the rationale is recorded on the Violent and Sex Offender Register and that a system is in place to allow assessment of the decision;
- any reactively-managed registered sex offenders meet the conditions set out in the authorised professional practice for the management of sexual offenders and violent offenders; and
- they carry out and assess Police National Database checks on registered sex offenders.

Cheshire Constabulary is compliant with this recommendation, with unannounced paired visits, supervisory oversight, annual visits for reactively managed offenders, and PND/PNC checks all in place and evidenced through auditable records.

Recommendation 15

By 31 October 2026, forces should:

- make sure psychological health screening is mandatory and provided at least annually (as per guidance from the National Police Wellbeing Service) for management of sexual offenders and violent offenders and online child sexual abuse and exploitation team members and supervisors with access to follow-on well-being services; and
- make sure that management of sexual offenders and violent offenders and online child sexual abuse and exploitation team supervisors have regular trauma-informed training and knowledge sharing to identify signs of trauma, burnout and other well-being issues and that they can refer to and access timely support and treatment where needed.

Cheshire Constabulary has strong wellbeing arrangements in place, including annual psychological screening for many high-risk roles and access to follow-on support.

Recommendation 16

By 31 October 2026, forces should make sure that they have a strong service level agreement in place with the Probation Service and that they have a two-way process for review, feedback and escalation to make sure safeguarding opportunities aren't being missed.

A service level agreement between police and probation has been agreed but requires a review which has been deferred until later in the year so it can reflect changes arising from the Sentencing Bill Act.



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Commissioner's Response:

As Police and Crime Commissioner, I welcome the publication of this inspection, which addresses two of the most sensitive and critical areas of modern policing: the investigation of online child sexual abuse and the management of registered sex offenders. Protecting children and vulnerable people remains an absolute priority, and this report provides an important and timely assessment of how effectively policing is meeting this challenge.

The findings highlight the growing complexity and scale of online exploitation. Digital platforms continue to evolve rapidly, enabling offenders to operate across borders and at pace. It is therefore essential that policing keeps step with these developments, with the right skills, technology, and resources in place to respond effectively. I recognise the dedication and professionalism of officers and staff working in this area, often under significant pressure and dealing with deeply distressing material.

At the same time, the inspection reinforces the need for consistency and continuous improvement. Effective safeguarding depends on robust processes for identifying, investigating, and managing risk. The supervision and management of registered sex offenders, including the use of preventative measures and multi-agency working, must be rigorous, proactive, and intelligence-led to reduce the risk of harm to the public.

I am particularly encouraged by the report's emphasis on partnership working. Tackling online child abuse and managing offenders cannot be achieved by policing alone. Strong collaboration with social care, education, health services, and national agencies is essential to ensure early intervention, safeguarding, and long-term protection.

In response to this inspection, I will work closely with the Chief Constable to ensure that recommendations are fully considered and implemented where required. This will include scrutiny through existing governance arrangements, ensuring there is clear accountability, measurable improvement, and transparency for the public. I will also continue to support investment in specialist capabilities, workforce wellbeing, and training to ensure our officers and staff are equipped to meet these complex demands.

Public confidence relies on knowing that the most vulnerable are protected and that those who pose a risk are effectively managed. This inspection provides a clear framework for strengthening that assurance, and I am committed to ensuring that our force continues to improve and deliver the highest standards of service in this vital area.



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Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner