



## RESPONSE BY THE PCC TO HMICFRS INSPECTIONS OF CLEVELAND POLICE

### INSPECTION DETAILS

Title of Inspection National Child Protection Inspections  
**PEEL: PCC HMICFRS Response**

Date Inspection Published  
21 September 2017

Type of Inspection:  Cleveland Specific  National  
 Follow Up  Thematic  
 Partner Inspection

Is Cleveland Police quoted in the Report?  Yes  No

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) undertook an inspection of child protection services in May 2017 as part of a rolling programme of child protection inspections.

Inspectors examined the effectiveness of the police's interactions with children, from initial contact through to investigations of offences against them. This also included the treatment of children in custody and how the force was structured, led and governed in relation to child protection services.

HMICFRS inspectors found that the force was committed to protecting children and this was reflected in the police and crime plan. This strong commitment was seen in chief constable, the chief officer team and the PCC.

In 2016 the force undertook an internal review of demand, which led to the allocation of additional resources for those departments responsible for child protection, the review also prompted significant changes to the governance and oversight arrangements that shaped the force's approach to child protection and vulnerability.

The inspection found that overall, working being done by the force was improving outcomes for vulnerable children and that the focus on vulnerability was translating into positive action for its child protection work and the following areas of good practice were highlighted:

- The combination of previously separate teams to create the vulnerable, exploited, missing and trafficked team (VEMT) provided a more cohesive approach and provided clear evidence of the force's considered and innovative approach to child protection;
- The VEMT's investigative and problem solving capacity worked alongside the children's charity Barnardo's, specifically to mitigate the risks faced by vulnerable children;
- The force was working in partnership with other safeguarding agencies and a children's hub (CHUB) had been established to provide effective and timely intervention in the safeguarding of children;
- Operation Encompass was established practice within the force and that had led to more timely and effective management of domestic abuse notifications from the force to the schools of affected children; and
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and domestic abuse where children are present was reflected in force performance data sets.

The HMICFRS acknowledged the work undertaken by the force with external safeguarding agencies from chief officer to practitioner level that had led to the development of a culture of continuous improvement and more effective joint working which had led to improved outcomes for children.

However, HMICFRS discovered some weaknesses in the force's approach to child protection which were as follows:

- Investigations often lacked evidence of supervision, contributing to drift in the investigations and inconsistent outcomes for children;
- HMICFRS were concerned about the force's response to those children reported missing, the assessment found a number of cases of missing children where there had been a failure to properly assess risk or undertake prompt and effective enquiries to locate children – many of whom were reported missing on a regular basis;
- The force needed to improve its approach to children detained in custody who were often vulnerable and had complex needs. HMICFRS found no evidence in any case they examined of referrals being made to children's social care services for an assessment of safeguarding needs to be undertaken. In addition, none of the cases where children were charged with an offence and denied bail where they transferred to alternative accommodation provided by the local authority. That meant that children were being unnecessarily detained in police custody; and
- During the course of the inspection, 81 cases of children being identified as being at risk were examined. The force's practice in 15 of those was assessed as good, in 42 as requiring improvement and 24 as inadequate. Demonstrating how there were still areas where improvement was required to ensure that the quality of the service the force provide to those children in need of help and protection is consistent and of the appropriate quality. Better recording of decisions, their rationale and the actions agreed would help the force achieve improvement.

In conclusion the inspection found a clear and unequivocal commitment to protecting vulnerable children, which was widely recognised by staff, officers and other agencies. However, whilst some improvement had been made the force needed to take action to strengthen its safeguarding practice in order to protect children at risk.

## **FORCE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chief Constable Iain Spittal said: “This report shows the real progress we’re making to ensure that all of our children grow up in safe environments, cared for and protected from harm.

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found that the Force is committed to protecting children. Protecting vulnerable people is a priority for both myself and the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and is reflected in the police and crime plan.

In 2016 we conducted an internal review of demand, which led to the allocation of additional resources for those departments responsible for child protection. The review also prompted significant changes to the governance and oversight arrangements that shape the force’s approach to child protection and vulnerability.

It is positive that HMICFRS found that work being done by the Force is improving outcomes for vulnerable children and that our focus on vulnerability is translating into positive action for its child protection work.

However, this is an on-going process and we cannot, for the sake of our children, afford to be complacent. We will closely study the HMICFRS report and act quickly to address, if we have not already done so since the inspection, areas of improvement. We have, as identified by HMICFRS, a clear and unequivocal commitment to protecting vulnerable children and we will continue to strive to provide that protection.

## **PCC RESPONSE TO INSPECTION**

Comment by the PCC:

This independent report acknowledges the deep commitment to child protection that is evident within Cleveland Police and my own office.

The headline summary of the report is that the work being done in this area by the force is successfully improving outcomes for vulnerable children and translating into positive action in child protection work.

This is the latest in a series of independent reports across many areas of force activity

which have reached the clear conclusion that Cleveland Police is improving and delivering a better service to local people. It is a clear reflection of the dedicated work of police officers and staff which should be welcomed by all and applauded.

The report also highlights areas for improvement and I intend to do all I can to ensure that this improvement takes place. The first thing I have done is to ensure that the cases highlighted in the report have been dealt with swiftly and appropriately. I have received assurances from the force that this has been the case.

On behalf of the public of Cleveland I hold the Force to account – In the immediate future I shall be holding a full scrutiny session in which senior officers will be called to address the areas of concern raised in this report and to outline clear steps that will be taken to tackle these areas – and build upon improvements that have already been made since the HMI inspected the Force. Where child protection is concerned there can be no complacency and as such I will ensure that it remains on the agenda for future scrutiny.

This will involve considering in further detail the actions contained within the force's response to the inspection and the resulting improvements, particularly in the following areas:

- staff awareness and training;
- Child Sexual Exploitation investigations/responses/oversight and management;
- the management of children in detention;
- multi-agency working; and
- the processes which the force use to gather, store and share information from police systems.

Let no-one be in any doubt, with more resources we could do more to protect the vulnerable, cuts to funding and officer numbers impact upon our ability to do this.

In the past fortnight central Government has effectively removed £500,000 from our budget in order to fund a bonus to officers. To fund this we will have to take money allocated elsewhere.

This money should have come from Government and should have been in the form of a consolidated pay rise, rather than a one-off bonus.

Cleveland Police will do all they can to protect local children. What is also required is for central Government to show that same resolve and I shall again be making clear to the Home Secretary that cuts to the police budget must end if we are to pro-actively protect children and the most vulnerable in society.

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