



## POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR CLEVELAND

### Vulnerability

Final Internal Audit Report 2.25/26

3 November 2025

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# AUDIT OUTCOME OVERVIEW

In line with our scope, the overview of our findings is detailed below.

**Background:** As part of the internal audit plan for 2025/26, we have undertaken a review of the Force's approach to vulnerability and how it recognises and responds to risks when working with vulnerable people. Our audit has taken a strategic view of the Force's approach to vulnerability, in comparison to other audits undertaken previously that have focused on more operational areas and sample testing of cases (see Evidence Led Prosecution – 9. 24/25). In particular, our audit has considered the response to the National Vulnerability Strategy and 14 strands of vulnerability, the governance structure in place to manage and monitor vulnerability, reviews and sampling undertaken internally with respect to vulnerability areas, as well as training and partnership arrangements.

The most recent National Child Protection Inspection (NCPI) for Cleveland Police was published in January 2025 and resulted in five graded judgements, with one being "adequate", two being "requires improvement", and two being "inadequate" (the lowest grade). In particular, one area that was highlighted by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) was missing person cases. Furthermore, the most recent PEEL (Police Efficiency, Effectiveness and Legitimacy) inspection published (in April 2025) by HMICFRS noted that the Force "requires improvement" with respect to protecting vulnerable people.

Given the size and range of areas that vulnerability covers, we agreed with management prior to the audit that for areas in which we undertake a deep dive into processes, a focus will be applied to Missing Persons, and Domestic Abuse.

**Conclusion:** Our review identified that work is underway to improve the Force's management and response to vulnerability following recent HMICFRS inspections. An updated Vulnerability Strategy was in draft, and the Force had produced a 4P (Prevent, Prepare, Protect and Pursue) Plan for 10 of the 14 vulnerability strands (with the remaining four in development). A number of governance groups were in place covering different vulnerability areas, with input from a range of individuals across the Force including members of the Chief Officer Team. Alongside this, the Force had an audit programme that is run by the Review and Assurance Team and covered a range of areas on a four-monthly cycle, including missing person cases, stop and search, and public protection notices (PPNs). Training was provided to officers regarding individual vulnerability areas, and there were several processes in place whereby the Force work with partner agencies to provide support to vulnerable individuals.

However, our review and discussions with management identified a number of areas for improvement, including the finalisation of all 4P Plans, and ensuring greater clarity over responsibilities for certain vulnerability cases. It was noted that the Force are currently reviewing the structure of certain commands as part of Operation Unify, as well as responsibilities for specific cases and areas.

As a result of our audit we agreed **one high, three medium** and **one low** priority management action. It should be noted that our findings have also taken into account the results of previous audits undertaken by RSM, as well as the findings of HMICFRS inspections (such as the NCPI), ensuring duplicate actions have not been agreed. Our review has also focused on vulnerability at a strategic level and did not consider individual cases, nor has sample testing been undertaken.

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**Audit themes:** Our review identified the following issues resulting in the agreement of one high and three medium priority management actions:

- **4P Plans**  
We confirmed that the Force has produced 4P (Prevent, Prepare, Protect and Pursue) Plans for 10 of the 14 vulnerability strands, with the remaining four in development. If 4P Plans are not in place for all vulnerability strands, there is a risk that progress in these areas may lack oversight and monitoring. **(Medium)**
- **Power BI dashboard**  
During discussion with the PVP Hub Manager, it was noted that a Power BI dashboard is in place that is used to identify the children of victims in domestic abuse cases. However, this dashboard does not show the children linked to suspects in domestic abuse cases. This has been flagged internally, and it was highlighted during our debrief meeting that work is underway to rectify this. However, there is a risk that a child (or children) could go unidentified, which could be a significant safeguarding concern, particularly in high-risk cases. **(High)**
- **HOTH**  
The Force have introduced a Harm Outside the Home (HOTH) Team, that works with partner agencies to identify, support and protect children from harm occurring outside the home. However, during discussion with management, there were concerns that the Missing Person Team and the HOTH Team are currently separated and do not have a clear link. Furthermore, there were also concerns from management regarding cases sitting within the Missing Person Team, and whether they would be suited to being managed by the Complex Exploitation Team. Work is underway to resolve these issues, however there is a risk that these cases may not be being managed as effectively as they could be. **(Medium)**
- **Missing person cases**  
During discussion with the Chief Inspector (Prevent) (responsible for the Missing Person Team), it was highlighted that there were concerns regarding the current arrangements for missing person cases, and whether additional clarity would be beneficial to ensure responsibilities are clear and an appropriate focus can be applied. If arrangements for missing person cases are not clear, there is a risk that this could cause confusion, which could result in cases not being appropriately managed. **(Medium)**

Further details of the low priority management action agreed can be found under section two of this report.

**We found the following control areas to be adequately designed and operating effectively:**

- **Vulnerability Strategy**  
The Force have a Vulnerability Strategy in place, with an updated version currently in draft. The Vulnerability Strategy sets out the Force's approach to managing vulnerability and cases involving vulnerable people, and is supported by a number of policies and guidance documents (such as the Domestic Abuse Policy and the Adult Protection Policy).
- **Governance structure**  
A number of governance meetings and groups covering vulnerability are in place across the Force, including the Tactical Vulnerability Group, Safeguarding Governance Group, Domestic Abuse Improvement Board, and the Victim and Witness Tactical Group. The Force also has a Governance of Audit and Inspection Board (GAIN) and whilst this does not focus on vulnerability, we have confirmed that topics relating to vulnerability are covered, such as the Force's response to the NCPI review and other audits and reviews undertaken.

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- **Internal reviews and sampling**

The Force have a four monthly review programme in which key topics or areas are subject to a deep dive by management and other relevant individuals. Recent examples include a missing persons review in April 2025 (following the NCPI and PEEL reports), and a PPN review in March 2025 covering domestic abuse, honour based abuse, missing children and arrested children cases. The Force Control Room (FCR) also has an audit function which includes reviewing calls to ensure they are correctly processed and key information has been recorded. This included checks to ensure vulnerability has been correctly identified and processed appropriately. Additional testing of this was included as part of the RSM Data Quality audit (11.24/25).

- **Training and awareness**

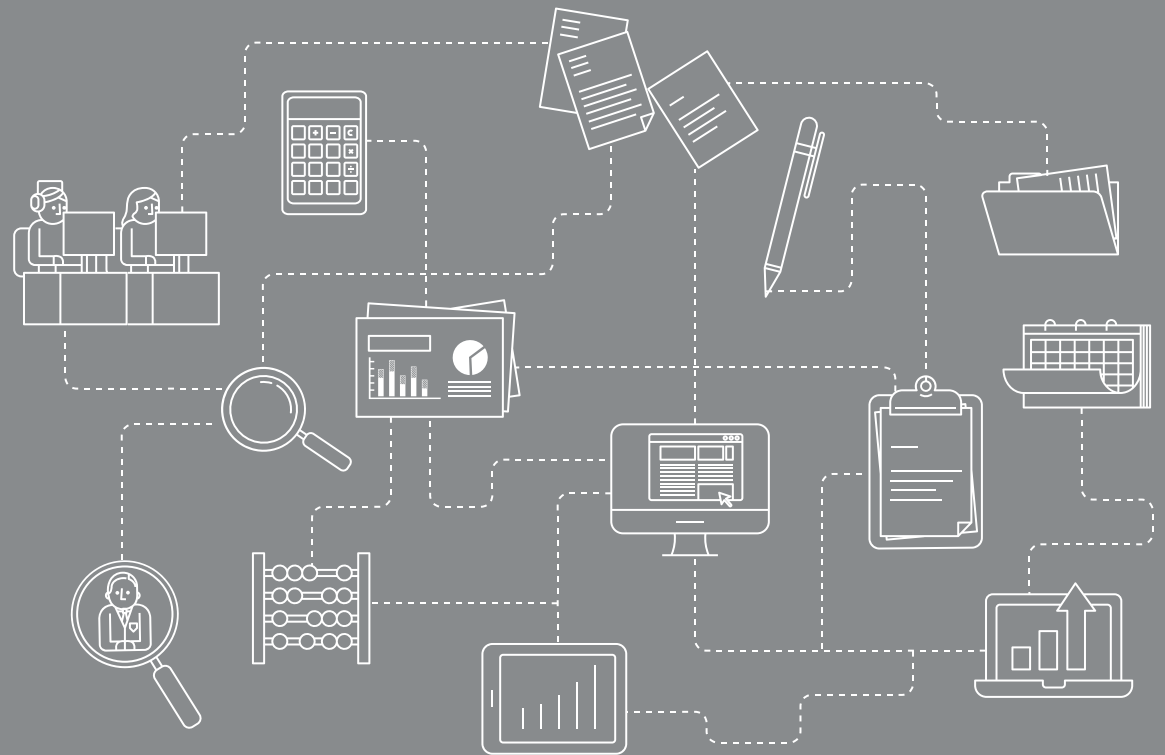
Specific vulnerability training is provided to staff and officers, and is provided by a range of different teams. Vulnerability is covered as part of the Police Constable Entry Programme (PCEP), and individual training and awareness presentations are provided by the PVP Hub, the FCR, the Learning and Development Team, as well as the Missing Person Team.

- **MARAC**

An Independent MARAC Chair works with the Force and partner agencies to discuss and monitor high-risk domestic abuse cases. The Independent MARAC Chair confirmed they have access to the risk assessments for domestic abuse cases, and review these on a regular basis to ensure appropriate assessments have been completed, and where appropriate a referral is made to MARAC.

# Summary of Actions for Management

# 01



# SUMMARY OF MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

The action priorities are defined as\*:

## High

Immediate management attention is necessary.

## Medium

Timely management attention is necessary.

## Low

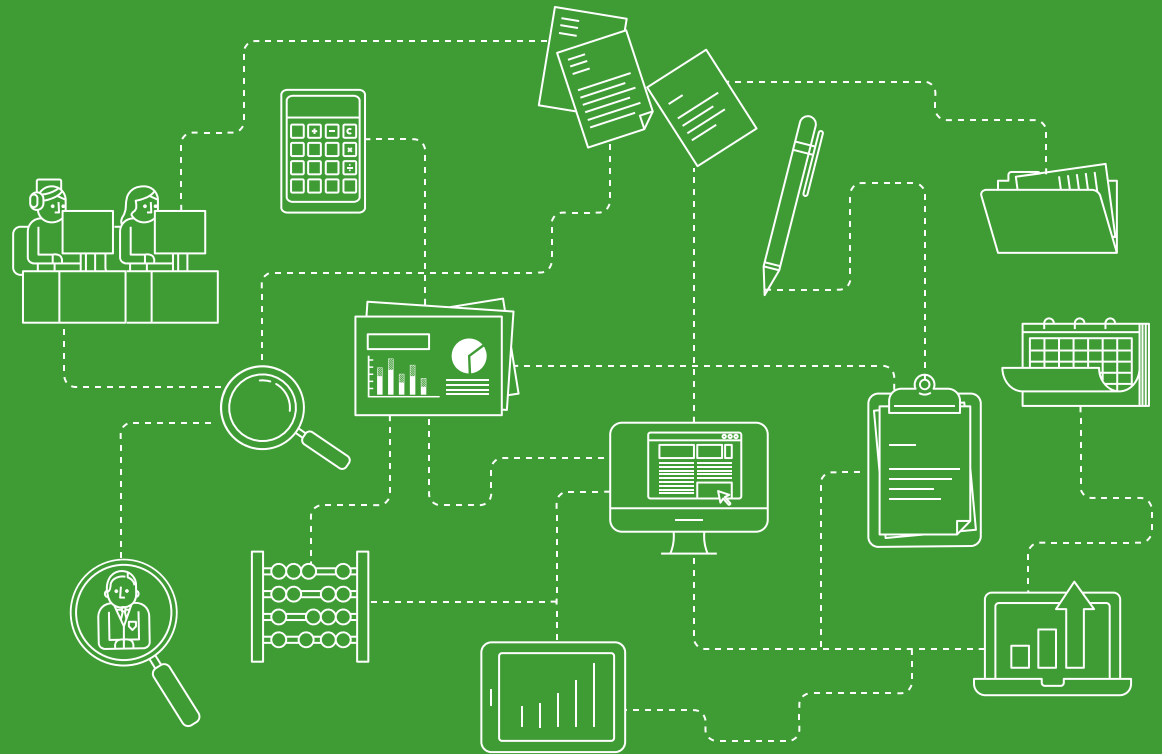
There is scope for enhancing control or improving efficiency.

Ref	Action	Priority	Responsible Owner	Date
1	The 4P Plan for each vulnerability strand will be created and used to monitor and track actions. Alongside this, target completion dates within each plan will be added for each action, to enable the Force to identify slippage and more accurately track progress.  Reporting to a governance group or committee will be documented for each plan to ensure adequate oversight is in place.	Medium	Detective Chief Inspector (Child Abuse and Vulnerable Adults (CAVA))	31 October 2025
2	The Force will consider whether capacity can be secured to implement a compliance function within the PVP Hub to identify trends and patterns.	Low	Detective Chief Inspector (Child Abuse and Vulnerable Adults (CAVA))	31 March 2026
3	The Force will urgently strengthen the functionality and accuracy regarding Power BI dashboards with respect to recording any linked children to a domestic abuse suspect and not just a victim.	High	PVP Hub Manager	31 August 2025
4	The Force will ensure responsibilities for missing persons and child exploitation cases are clear, and introduce processes to enable communication between different teams.	Medium	Chief Inspector (Complex Exploitation Team)	31 August 2025
5	The Force will review the current arrangements for the Missing Person Team, with any outcomes actioned and implemented.	Medium	Superintendent (Prevention)	31 December 2025

\* Refer to Appendix A for more detail

# Detailed Findings and Actions

02





## DETAILED FINDINGS AND ACTIONS

This report has been prepared by exception. Therefore, we have included in this section, only those areas of weakness in control or examples of lapses in control identified from our testing and not the outcome of all audit testing undertaken.

Area: Vulnerability		
<b>Control</b>	The Force have developed 4P Plans for each of the 14 vulnerability strands, setting out any actions and improvements to be made.  Governance of the plans are managed by the Tactical Vulnerability Group and relevant governance groups.	<b>Assessment:</b>
		<b>Design</b> ✓ <b>Compliance</b> x
<b>Findings / Implications</b>	<p>Through discussion with Detective Chief Inspector (Adult Safeguarding) we confirmed that 4P delivery plans have been developed which cover the 14 vulnerability strands identified within the National Vulnerability Strategy. Through review of the plans for Domestic Abuse and Missing Persons, we confirmed that each plan sets out the actions that are required in relation to each area, action owner, a progress update, target completion date, delivery confidence rating and completion date.</p> <p>During discussion with the Detective Chief Inspector (Adult Safeguarding), it was highlighted that the Force are in the early stages of identifying the process to track these plans, but that it is anticipated that each plan owner will be required to provide an exception report to the Tactical Vulnerability Group if there were any issues. From review of the agenda for the Tactical Vulnerability Group meeting on 22 April 2025, we confirmed that seven 4P Plans had been presented by the plan owners for discussion. Alongside the Tactical Vulnerability Group, each plan will report to another relevant governance group to provide additional oversight. For example, the Domestic Abuse 4P Plan will report to the Domestic Abuse Improvement Board. However, as noted above, the Force are in the early stages of this process, and we cannot yet comment that this is fully in place and embedded.</p> <p>We noted that although some of the plans are still being produced, the majority are now in place, with actions having been assigned to owners which are currently in progress. We noted that of the 14 strands, a 4P Plan is in place for 10, with the remaining four currently in development (Forced Marriage, Honour Based Abuse, Rape and Sexual Violence, and Stalking and Harassment). During our audit, the individual responsible for the Stalking and Harassment 4P Plan confirmed that it is currently in draft and close to being finalised. It should also be noted that two strands (FGM and Child Abuse) have been merged into one 4P Plan, and that whilst a dedicated Modern Day Slavery 4P Plan is not in place, this is covered as part of a Human Trafficking (which is not a vulnerability strand) 4P Plan.</p> <p>We confirmed that each 4P Plan is available to staff via the Force's SharePoint Page.</p> <p>Whilst a 4P Plan is in place for 10 of the 14 strands, we noted that some of the plans do not appear fully complete and lack target completion dates for all actions. Most notably, we identified four plans in which there are no target completion dates for any action, or no target completion dates for more than half of actions. These were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adults at Risk;</li> <li>• Child Abuse and FGM (these are two separate strands but covered within one 4P Plan);</li> <li>• Sex Work; and</li> </ul>	

## Area: Vulnerability

- Vulnerability to Radicalisation.

Whilst some of the plans are in the early stages and not fully complete, the structure applied to the 10 strands captures the required criteria including clear actions and owners, and adopting this for the remaining four strands will ensure a consistent approach to delivering and tracking progress.

If a 4P Plan is not in place for each vulnerability strand, and actions within plans do not have target completion dates, there is a risk that the Force may not be able to adequately or accurately track progress or identify actions which are overdue and may require further oversight.

<b>Management Action 1</b>	<p>The 4P Plan for each vulnerability strand will be created and used to monitor and track actions. Alongside this, target completion dates within each plan will be added for each action, to enable the Force to identify slippage and more accurately track progress.</p> <p>Reporting to a governance group or committee will be documented for each plan to ensure adequate oversight is in place.</p>	<b>Responsible Owner:</b> Detective Chief Inspector (Adult Safeguarding)	<b>Date:</b> 31 October 2025	<b>Priority:</b> <b>Medium</b>
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## Area: Vulnerability

Control	Partially missing control  The PVP Hub does not have a dedicated compliance function that could be used to proactively monitor trends, training needs and lessons learned.	Assessment:  Design × Compliance -		
Findings / Implications	<p>During discussion with the PVP Hub Manager, it was highlighted that the PVP Hub does not have a Compliance Officer or individual responsible for identifying trends and training needs, and escalating this to the wider Force. They highlighted that one member of the PVP Hub undertook similar work (regarding missing person cases) for a period, resulting in significant improvement to performance metrics. However, this individual has since returned to their initial responsibilities and performance metrics have also returned to their original numbers.</p> <p>The PVP Hub Manager also noted that whilst the Power BI dashboard in place is used by the Force to identify gaps relating to vulnerable cases (such as domestic abuse cases), the dashboard is used proactively rather than reactively. As a result, additional work is undertaken after discrepancies or problems have been identified. If a compliance process was implemented within the PVP Hub, this could be used to proactively monitor issues and discrepancies relating to areas within the PVP Hub and move the Force away from a reactive approach.</p> <p>Given the nature of this finding and the lack of a dedicated compliance function, there is no evidence supporting the existence of a compliance function. As such, we have captured the key steps being taken by the PVP Hub from meetings with management.</p>			
Management Action 2	The Force will consider whether capacity can be secured to implement a compliance function within the PVP Hub to identify trends and patterns.	Responsible Owner: Detective Chief Inspector (Adult Safeguarding)	Date: 31 March 2026	Priority: Low

## Area: Vulnerability

Control	Officers and Sergeants undertake the initial risk assessment for domestic abuse cases, using a standard template to grade risk.	Assessment:		
	The Force's PVP Hub is responsible for the secondary risk assessment for domestic abuse cases, using a standard template and making referrals where required.	Design	✓	
		Compliance	×	
Findings / Implications	We confirmed that the PVP Hub is responsible for assisting the wider Force with regards to vulnerable individuals, particularly relating to domestic abuse cases. Part of the responsibilities of the PVP Hub is to undertake a secondary risk assessment of domestic abuse cases, and ensure that they have been completed correctly and key information has not been missed. This is following the initial risk assessment that is completed by the Sergeant. The PVP Hub ensure risk assessments are complete, and can also make referrals such as to children's social care, MARAC, or the Local Authority. Alongside this, the PVP Hub also assist with the Operation Encompass process, enabling schools to be aware of children that may have been present in a domestic abuse case.			
	We confirmed that the PVP Hub's secondary risk assessments are documented on Niche, and further testing of this has been undertaken as part of the RSM evidence-led prosecutions audit (9. 24/25).			
	The PVP Hub Manager noted that the Power BI dashboard used by the PVP Hub for domestic abuse cases has the functionality to show linked children for each victim. This enables officers to ensure important information is recorded and considered, particularly in serious cases where children's social care are required to be informed of the incident. However, it was noted that the dashboard only shows children linked to the victim and not the suspect. As such, if the suspect for a domestic abuse case is responsible for children but the victim isn't, these children would not be identified.			
	The PVP Hub Manager noted that this has been flagged, and a request made for this to be addressed. However, there is a significant risk that the children of a suspect in a domestic abuse case could go unidentified, and the Force may not make the relevant referrals or undertake the appropriate safeguarding checks required. In particular, Operation Encompass requires the Force to notify schools if police have attended a domestic violence or abuse incident in which the child has been directly or indirectly involved. Whilst this should be clear where the child is directly involved and present during the incident, there is a risk that a child could go unidentified if they are not present at the incident, they are indirectly involved, and they are not linked to the victim.			
	It should be noted that during our debrief meeting, the T/Superintendent (Adult Safeguarding) confirmed that work is underway to address this, however we have agreed that the action will remain to ensure this is resolved and embedded and providing further clarity as part of our follow up audits.			
Management Action 3	The Force will urgently strengthen the functionality and accuracy regarding Power BI dashboards with respect to recording any linked children to a domestic abuse suspect and not just a victim.	Responsible Owner: PVP Hub Manager	Date: 31 August 2025	Priority: High

Area: Vulnerability				
Control	The Force have a HOTH Team which works with partners and the Local Authority to identify, assess and manage cases in which there is significant risk to children.	Assessment:		
	Daily meetings are undertaken to assess and discuss these cases and ensure appropriate support has been provided.	Design		✓
		Compliance		×
Findings / Implications	Through discussion with Detective Chief Inspector (Complex Exploitation Team), we noted that a new team has been created called HOTH, with the purpose of this team being to work with partner agencies to identify, support and protect children from harm occurring outside the home. Through review of the HOTH SOP and discussion with the Detective Chief Inspector (Complex Exploitation Team), we identified that the HOTH Team work with members of the Local Authority HOTH Team to discuss children referred or flagged since the previous meeting. For example, this could be a child that has been arrested or reported missing or referred by a partner agency.			
	Via a screenshot of Outlook calendars, we confirmed that daily meetings are held with all members of HOTH in the area, to discuss the flagged and referred children and assess them via the screening tool. Each child is RAG rated to identify the risk associated with them, with any scoring red or amber going through HOTH. The HOTH process is led by each Local Authority within the area, with the Force being a key partner within the process. It was noted that there is one remaining Local Authority which has not fully rolled out this process yet but is in the process of doing so.			
	Whilst HOTH does not exclusively cover a specific type of area (such as domestic abuse or missing persons), it was noted by the Detective Chief Inspector (Complex Exploitation Team) that many of the vulnerability areas are intrinsically linked. Furthermore, it was flagged that HOTH is aligned to the Complex Exploitation Team, and whilst this is relevant to the cases seen by HOTH, there are other teams within the Force where it could be beneficial for them to have more involvement. The Detective Chief Inspector (Complex Exploitation Team) confirmed that work is underway to schedule regular meetings between the HOTH Team and the Missing Person Team to address this. However, if relevant teams are not fully linked, there is a risk that key indicators for escalation could go unidentified.			
	During discussion with the Chief Inspector (Prevention Command) (responsible for the Missing Person Team) they also highlighted the issue with responsibilities, noting that in some instances it can be unclear where responsibility for certain cases sits.			
	It should be noted that following the audit debrief meeting and issuing of the draft report, management have confirmed that work has been undertaken to address this, and responsibilities are now clearer. Daily meetings have been introduced to ensure communication and collaboration with other teams, including the Missing Person Team and other partner agencies. However, as this was not in place at the time of the audit, we have agreed to retain the action and that this will be reviewed as part of a future follow up audit.			
Management Action 4	The Force will ensure responsibilities for missing persons and child exploitation cases are clear, and introduce processes to enable communication between different teams.	Responsible Owner: Chief Inspector (Complex Exploitation Team)	Date: 31 August 2025	Priority: Medium

Area: Vulnerability		
<b>Control</b>	The Force have a Missing Person Team responsible for tracking relevant cases and supporting officers.	<b>Assessment:</b>

## Area: Vulnerability

Design ✓  
Compliance ×

### Findings / Implications

During discussion with the Chief Inspector (Prevent), they highlighted that they are responsible for the Missing Person Team who review and track live missing person cases. As part of this process, the team review the risk assessment assigned to confirm it is accurate and reflective of the circumstances.

However, the Chief Inspector flagged that whilst the team have had a positive impact on locating missing people and reducing individuals that are repeatedly missing, it wasn't clear on the position of the team and whether responsibility would be kept, moved back to Local Policing, and whether individual resources would be available. Currently, cases are handed back to operational policing after 4pm as there is insufficient resource to appropriately manage the cases.

However, due to the risk involved associated with missing person cases, the Chief Inspector (Prevent) highlighted that these can be significantly high risk as it is not initially clear whether the missing individual is the victim of a serious crime. The Force should therefore review the arrangements in place for missing person cases to ensure they can be appropriately managed and there is a clear structure in place.

It should be noted that following the debrief meeting and issuing of the draft report, management have confirmed that an evaluation of the Missing Person Team has been undertaken and is scheduled to be presented to the ACC on 22 August 2025. This will enable the Force to assess the progress of the Team, and the next steps going forward. As such, we have agreed an action that reflects this work and will allow us to provide further assurance in future follow up audits.

### Management Action 5

The Force will review the current arrangements for the Missing Person Team, with any outcomes actioned and implemented.

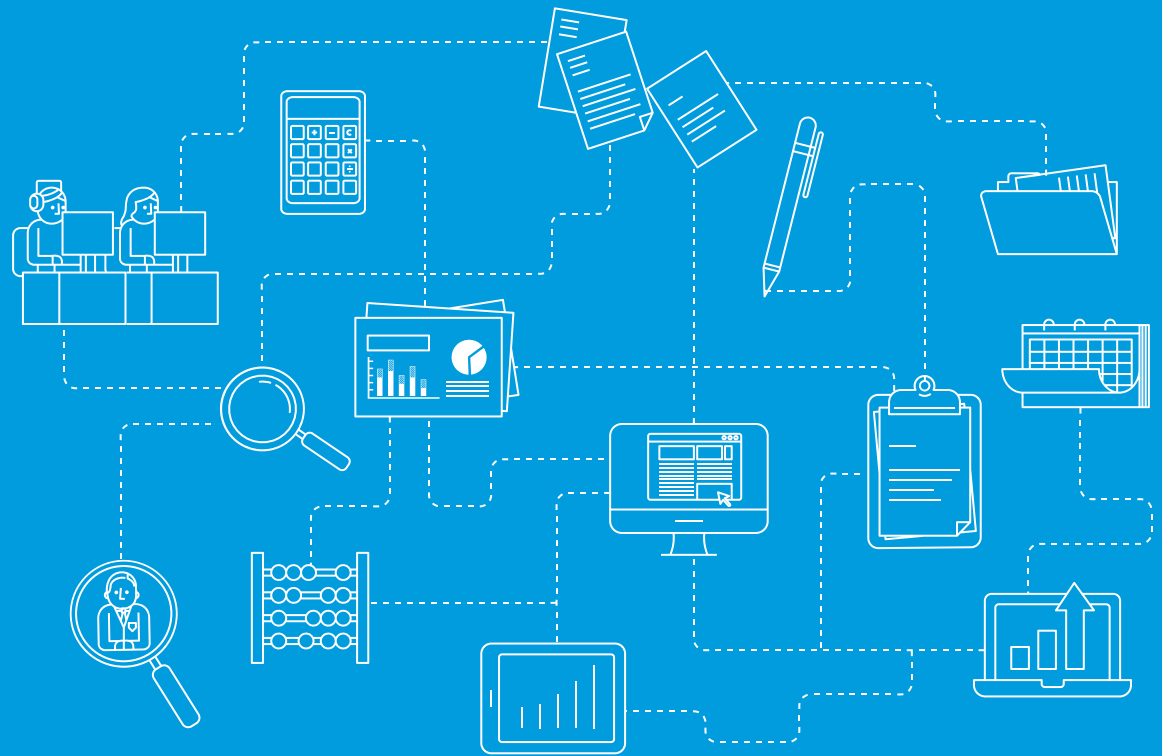
**Responsible Owner:**  
Superintendent  
(Prevention)

**Date:**  
31 December 2025

**Priority:**  
Medium

# Appendices

# 03



# APPENDIX A: CATEGORISATION OF FINDINGS

## Categorisation of internal audit findings

**Low**  
There is scope for enhancing control or improving efficiency.

**Medium**  
Timely management attention is necessary. This is an internal control risk management issue that could lead to: Financial losses which could affect the effective function of a department, loss of controls or process being audited or possible reputational damage, negative publicity in local or regional media.

**High**  
Immediate management attention is necessary. This is a serious internal control or risk management issue that may lead to: Substantial losses, violation of corporate strategies, policies or values, reputational damage, negative publicity in national or international media or adverse regulatory impact, such as loss of operating licences or material fines.

The following table highlights the number and categories of management actions made as a result of this audit.

Area	Control design not effective*	Non-compliance with controls*	Agreed actions		
			Low	Medium	High
Vulnerability	1 (12)	5 (12)	1	3	1
Total			1	3	1

\* Shows the number of controls not adequately designed or not complied with. The number in brackets represents the total number of controls reviewed in this area.

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<b>Debrief held</b>	25 June 2025
<b>Draft report issued</b>	11 July 2025
<b>Revised Draft report issued</b>	8 August 2025
<b>Responses received</b>	3 November 2025

<b>Final report issued</b>	3 November 2025
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