



RESPONSE BY THE PCC TO HMICFRS INSPECTIONS OF CLEVELAND POLICE

INSPECTION DETAILS

Title of Inspection - The policing response to the investigation of online child sexual abuse and the management of registered sex offenders - PEEL spotlight report

Date Inspection Published - 15 April 2026

Type of Inspection:

- ☐ Cleveland Specific
☐ Follow Up
☐ Partner Inspection

- ☒ National
☐ Thematic

Is Cleveland Police quoted in the Report? ☒ Yes ☐ No

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF REPORT

This spotlight report highlights how police forces and national bodies must work together to make sure forces can meet the demand faced by online child sexual abuse and exploitation teams and management of sexual offenders and violent offenders (MOSOVO) teams.

HMICFRS has reviewed the findings related to the work done by these teams from its 2021/22 and 2023/25 police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) inspections, and identified where police forces could further improve, as well as examples of good practice and innovation.

HMICFRS has identified opportunities for the National Police Chiefs' Council, College of Policing and the Home Office to work with forces to improve the system. The report makes 16 recommendations to support this aim.

Investigation of online child sexual abuse

This section of the report sets out HMICFRS's findings on how well police forces investigate online child sexual abuse. The section:

- discusses governance and operating models, including how investigations are assessed, allocated and progressed;
- discusses the number of police officers and staff, including workloads and the quality of training and guidance;
- examines suspect arrests, bail, bail conditions, bail checks and whether these are being used appropriately; and
- assesses suspect management, welfare support for families and the use of child offender diversion programmes.

Key findings

- **Most forces have good governance and operating models for the investigation of online child sexual abuse**
- **Forces should have well-structured teams and processes in place to effectively investigate online child sexual abuse**

Recommendation 1

By 31 October 2026, forces should:

- 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.
- **Police officers and staff need to do more training to investigate online child sexual abuse**

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.

Recommendation 3

By 31 December 2026, the College of Policing should:

- review the 'Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation: Practice Advice for Investigating Online CSAE' and create an authorised professional practice for this area in conjunction with this advice; and
 - implement a national investigators' course for the management of online child sexual abuse and exploitation.
- **Forces aren't always effectively managing the risk posed by online child sexual abuse suspects**

Recommendation 4

By 31 October 2026, forces should:

- 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.

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.

Management of registered sex offenders

This section of the report sets out HMICFRS's findings on how well police forces manage registered sex offenders. The section:

- discusses whether forces monitor and achieve consistent performance across all MOSOVO teams;
- examines their different operating models, whether forces can manage demand and assess risk and whether they have enough appropriately trained officers, staff and supervisors; and
- assesses the need for updated guidance for MOSOVO teams.

Key findings

- **Inconsistent operating practices and team structures are affecting the successful management of registered sex offenders**
- **Poor performance analysis and demand management is affecting the successful management of registered sex offenders**

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 this represents what is on the Violent and Sex Offender Register to accurately assess and manage the risk of registered sex offenders.

Recommendation 7

By 30 April 2027, the Home Office should continue to consult with police forces on the need to fund further development of the new Multi-Agency Public Protection System after its introduction, including enhanced management information to help forces properly manage the risk posed by registered sex offenders.

- **A lack of trained personnel means that forces aren't always effectively managing the risk posed by registered sex offenders**

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.
- **Forces must understand and follow national guidance to better manage registered sex offenders**

Recommendation 9

By 30 April 2027, the Home Office in conjunction with the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council should evaluate the potential for an effective and expedited process for police application to the courts to remove Sexual Harm Prevention Orders for appropriate cases.

Recommendation 10

By 31 October 2026, forces should make sure that:

- 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.

Recommendation 11

By 30 April 2027, the College of Policing in conjunction with the National Police Chiefs' Council should review the authorised professional practice for the management of sexual offenders and violent offenders with forces and publish an updated version.

Linked themes

In this section, HMICFRS discusses investment in digital training and technology in the investigation of online child sexual abuse and the management of sexual offenders. HMICFRS also assesses digital device examination timescales, well-being provision for specialist teams and internal and external partnerships.

Key findings

- **Forces must invest in technology and train officers and staff to use it effectively**

Recommendation 12

By 30 April 2027, the College of Policing should:

- make sure that a bespoke national digital training course is mandated for management of sexual offenders and violent offenders offender managers; and
- develop a bespoke management of sexual offenders and violent offenders supervisors' training package to make sure that they have sufficient training and skills to consistently carry out their roles.

Recommendation 13

By 30 April 2027, the Home Office and National Police Chiefs' Council should carry out a cost-benefit analysis for a procurement exercise for all 43 forces in England and Wales to purchase digital triage equipment collectively, rather than individually, for investigating online child sexual abuse and the management of sexual offenders and violent offenders.

Recommendation 14

By 31 December 2026, the National Police Chiefs' Council and College of Policing should develop a risk assessment tool that allows each of the 43 forces in England and Wales to consistently assess and prioritise the submission and examination of digital devices in a way that also effectively reduces the existing backlog.

- **Adequate well-being provision for MOSOVO and OCSAE teams is essential**

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.
- **Strong partnership working is essential within forces and with other statutory organisations**

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.

Conclusion

This spotlight report highlights how forces must review their working practices to make sure they are fit for the demand faced by investigators in online child sexual abuse and exploitation and management of sexual offenders and violent offenders (MOSOVO) teams now and in the future. These teams are facing ever-increasing demand at the same time as police officers and staff numbers are reducing. This needs to be addressed at a national level.

Too often these teams are viewed in isolation during change programmes and in the development of cases to request increases in officers and staff. But they are intrinsically linked.

At a national level, review and revision of guidance (especially the College of Policing's authorised professional practice for MOSOVO) and training is needed at pace to support consistent high-quality work in both online child sexual abuse and exploitation and MOSOVO teams. This guidance should consider the ever-increasing workloads of both teams and the change in offending types. It should support officers and staff working in this important and challenging area and make sure that they have access to tools and training to support them to do their jobs more effectively.

The time that forces are taking to examine digital downloads and digital forensics isn't acceptable. Forces must be more efficient in the use of digital forensics and invest in teams,

equipment and training to improve wait times. These need to be reduced to improve public safeguarding, achieve better results and to reduce the workloads of officers and staff.

More investment in technology is required to make these roles more efficient. This should be a national consideration to improve standards across England and Wales. Police forces need help with management information in MOSOVO teams. The inclusion of this requirement in the new Multi-Agency Public Protection System, which is being introduced by the Home Office in 2028, would have made forces more efficient and created consistency across England and Wales. It would allow for better and more efficient analysis and risk management than forces' existing solutions. Including the need for more investment in technology should be a priority.

MOSOVO teams should get the recognition they deserve. All too often they are overlooked because some forces can't measure the crime and harm that they prevent. This lack of information means that some forces can't see the benefit of investing in these teams. Instead they invest in teams where senior leaders can view performance data, including an increase in crime detections or arrests, the timeliness of investigations and higher positive outcome rates for victims. But the work of MOSOVO teams is no less important. Preventing crime and harm in the community must be a priority for policing in times of such financial strain.

During HMICFRS's 2021/22 and 2023-25 police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy inspections, the inspectorate found real improvements in the work of both online child sexual abuse and exploitation and MOSOVO teams. The inspectorate has seen greater investment, stronger governance, better use of technology and improved officer and staff welfare. But too many forces have neglected these important areas of policing.

These forces and overarching national bodies need to continue to work proactively and at speed to better safeguard communities and support these dedicated teams; teams that every day complete work that most of us couldn't bear to be involved in.

A copy of the full report can be accessed here: [The policing response to the investigation of online child sexual abuse and the management of registered sex offenders - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services](#)

FORCE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Force acknowledges the need to work with national bodies to ensure we can meet the demand faced by online child sexual abuse and exploitation teams and management of sexual offenders and violent offenders (MOSOVO) teams.

In the January 2025 Cleveland Police's National Child Protection Inspection (NCPI) report was published. HMICFRS identified two causes of concern relating to Cleveland Police's response to safeguarding children:

1. how the Force responds to missing children, and
2. how it investigates online child sexual exploitation.

and issued five areas for improvement (AFIs).

The Force took immediate action to address the inspection findings in advance of the report publication and developed a detailed action plan to drive the required improvements. As a result of two follow up visits completed by HMICFRS, in which they were satisfied with our progress, both causes of concern and all AFIs were closed.

In April 2026, the PCC for Cleveland held a scrutiny session focussed on Child Protection and Safeguarding and sought assurance that the Force:

- continues to work proactively to safeguard children and prevent exploitation and harm

- has made the necessary improvements since the publication of the NCPI in January 2025

The Force was graded 'Assured' and the PCC noted the positive work undertaken by the Force to address the issues highlighted in the HMICFRS NCPI report

The Force has adopted a standard process to ensure that any recommendations resulting from local and national inspection activity are promptly considered and allocated for action. Facilitated plenary sessions are held upon receipt of all new inspection reports and any identified improvement activity is incorporated into the relevant PEEL Assessment Framework (PAF) improvement plan. In line with this process, the nine recommendations, identified for forces made within this report have been considered at the Force Governance of Audit and Inspection (GAIN) Board, chaired by the Deputy Chief Constable, and a Chief Officer lead and delivery leads have been assigned to both identify and implement any improvement activity required.

A plenary session has taken place to discuss the actions, detail the Force's current position, identify what if any action is required to satisfy the action and to collate evidence that would support the closure of the action.

Initial results of the discussions are detailed below:

Recommendation 1; The Force already uses both KIRAT and prioritisation tools to aid effective triage and review of investigations. Flags are added to identified suspects to aid timely reviews based on developing intelligence / incidents. Our Paedophile Online Investigation Team (POLIT) is one of only six across all forces that manages all NCA led online CSAE investigations. A small number of 'lower risk' online CSAE offences are managed by frontline teams; for which training and support is provided.

Recommendation 2; Staffing levels and demand continue to be an area of discussion and are reviewed annually. Demand is expected to quadruple from 2023 to 2027.

Recommendation 4; The Force follows its' published Child Protection Guidance, that details the responsibilities of the POLIT Team. Arrest and bail continue to be the Force's primary response. Currently proactive bail checks are by exception only.

Recommendation 5; The Force has worked with partners to develop bespoke family, victim and suspect packages and leaflets for operational use. The Force website and internal SharePoint provide additional best practice advice, signposting and support.

Recommendation 6; The Force has a centralised MOSOVO Team that manage all Registered Sex Offenders (RSOs) across the force area. The MOSOVO Team follows the practices outlined in the MOSOVO Guidance published on the Force's SharePoint. Statistics are reported to the management team on a weekly basis.

Recommendation 8; The Force collates demand information, staffing constraints and predicted future demand through the annual Force Management Statement (FMS) process. This allows senior leaders to make an assessment of risk regarding unmet demand and for the allocation of additional resources where appropriate. The MOSOVO Team are not required to allocate staff to support other force functions. Statistics are produced weekly, which include the ratio of offender managers to registered sex offenders and the number of outstanding visits and assessments.

Recommendation 10; The MOSOVO Team follow the practices outlined in the MOSOVO Guidance, in relation to reactive management and conducting unannounced visits in pairs; any requirement for a single person visit requires pre-approval by a supervisor which is recorded on ViSOR. Occasionally the team draw on resources from the wider Prevention Command to supplement Offender Managers to conduct visits. The MOSOVO guidance is reflective of APP.

Recommendation 15; All MOSOVO Team staff are subject to annual psychological assessments conducted by the Force Wellbeing Team. Staff attend regular events within police premises to promote wellbeing, including access to therapy dogs and health screening. Regular CPD events are held for the team where 'Wellbeing' is a standing item on the agenda.

Recommendation 16; The MOSOVO Team have embedded Probation staff working as part of their team, co-located within police premises. This has created effective working practices. An escalation process is in place and senior leadership are in almost daily contact with Probation managers. The Chief Constable also meets regularly with Probation leads to discuss their respective areas of business.

Evidence and additional information is being collated with a view to concluding these actions at the earliest opportunity.

Ongoing progress will be tracked through the relevant Force delivery group and will be overseen by the GAIN Board until sufficient evidence is provided that the recommendations have been met.

PCC RESPONSE TO INSPECTION

Comment by the PCC:

The PCC recognises the urgent need for a national review and modernisation of policing practices to better manage the growing demand placed on investigators working in online child sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as on Management of Sexual Offenders and Violent Offenders (MOSOVO) teams. These specialist units are facing significant and sustained increases in workload at a time when police officer and staff numbers are declining. Addressing this challenge at a national level is essential to ensure that forces can continue to protect vulnerable people effectively and manage risk in our communities.

The PCC acknowledges the findings of the PEEL spotlight report and supports HMICFRS's 16 recommendations aimed at improving standards in the investigation of online child sexual exploitation and the management of registered sex offenders.

Two of the PCC's priorities, as set out in the Cleveland Police and Crime Plan 2024-29, are to build trust and confidence in policing and the justice system, and to ensure the right support is available for victims and vulnerable people.

Between 17 and 28 June 2024, HMICFRS conducted an inspection of Cleveland Police's child protection arrangements. The findings, published in January 2025, assessed the Force as "requires improvement" in two areas, "inadequate" in two areas, and "adequate" in one area. The five areas examined were:

- Leadership of child protection arrangements (requires improvement)
- Working with safeguarding partners (adequate)
- Responding to children at risk (inadequate)
- Assessing the risk to children and making appropriate referrals (requires improvement)
- Investigating reports of abuse, neglect, and exploitation (inadequate)

HMICFRS identified two causes of concern relating to Cleveland Police's response to safeguarding children:

3. how the Force responds to missing children, and
4. how it investigates online child sexual exploitation.

A Scrutiny Meeting held on 1 April 2025 considered the topic of Child Protection and Child Exploitation. The PCC was partly assured by the evidence provided by the Force and commended the commitment and dedication shown by officers and staff in delivering immediate and ongoing

improvements. It was agreed that performance in this area would continue to be monitored and would be revisited in 2026, with the Force being required to present evidence demonstrating the impact of its work.

A further Scrutiny Meeting was held on 30 April 2026, at which the topic of Child Protection and Safeguarding was reviewed. In line with the PCC's statutory responsibilities and the actions agreed at the April 2025 meeting, the PCC was seeking to:

- hold the Chief Constable to account for fulfilling duties relating to the protection of children
- obtain assurance that the Force continues to work proactively to safeguard children and prevent exploitation and harm
- provide reassurance to the public that the Force has made the necessary improvements since the publication of the NCPI in January 2025

The PCC was assured by the information submitted by the Force, noting that the positive work undertaken to address the issues highlighted in the HMICFRS NCPI is already having a meaningful impact. The PCC recognises, however, that this remains a critical area of focus and will require continued monitoring. To maintain effective oversight and ensure that the positive direction of travel is sustained, the PCC will request a further performance update next year.

At the Scrutiny Meeting held on 22 October 2025, the PCC examined the Force's approach to the Management of Sexual and Violent Offenders. Given the PCC's priorities, the rising number of registered sexual offenders locally and nationally, and the recommendations made by Mick Creedon QPM in the Home Office's independent review, the PCC sought assurance that the Force has robust governance, operational structures, risk management processes, and protective measures in place to:

- effectively manage the risks posed by sexual offenders, violent offenders, and potentially dangerous persons (PDPs)
- protect, safeguard, and support victims and potential victims of sexual harm

The PCC was assured by the evidence presented by the Force.

In light of the serious issues identified in the PEEL spotlight report, the PCC will continue to monitor these matters closely and maintain strengthened strategic oversight to ensure meaningful and measurable improvements in the police response to these critical areas.

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