

National Child Protection Inspections

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Foreword

All children deserve to grow up in a safe environment, cared for and protected from harm. Most children thrive in loving families and grow to adulthood unharmed. Unfortunately, still too many children are abused or neglected by those responsible for their care; they sometimes need to be protected from other adults with whom they come into contact and some occasionally go missing, or are spending time in environments, or with people, harmful to them.

While it is everyone's responsibility to look out for vulnerable children, police forces, working together and with other agencies, have a particular role in protecting children and ensuring that their needs are met.

Protecting children is one of the most important tasks the police undertake. Only the police can investigate suspected crimes and arrest perpetrators, and they have a significant role in monitoring sex offenders. Police officers have the power to take a child who is in danger to a place of safety, or to seek an order to restrict an offender's contact with children. The police service also has a significant role working with other agencies to ensure the child's protection and well-being, longer term.

Police officers are often the eyes and ears of the community as they go about their daily tasks and come across children who may be neglected or abused. They must be alert to, and identify, children who may be at risk.

To protect children well, the police service must undertake all its core duties to a high standard. Police officers must talk with children, listen to them and understand their fears and concerns. The police must also work well with other agencies to ensure that no child slips through the net and that over-intrusion and duplication of effort are avoided.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is inspecting the child protection work of every police force in England and Wales. The reports are intended to provide information for the police, the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and the public on how well children are protected and their needs are met, and to secure improvements for the future.

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1. Introduction

This report is a summary of the findings of an inspection of child protection services in Dyfed-Powys Police which took place in October 2014. The report comprises nine chapters in three main parts. The first part provides information on the background to the inspection and to Dyfed-Powys Police. The second part focuses on the inspection findings, and the third part looks to the future and makes recommendations for improvement.

2. Background

Between October 2011 and March 2013, HMIC was involved, on a multi-agency basis, in a number of child protection inspections. Along with evidence of strengths and effective practice, these inspections highlighted areas for improvement, in particular: the quality of joint investigations; the identification of risk; dealing with domestic abuse; and the detention of children in custody.

To address these issues, HMIC decided to conduct a programme of single agency inspections of all police forces in England and Wales. The aims of the inspection programme are to:

- assess how effectively police forces safeguard children at risk;
- make recommendations to police forces for improving child protection practice;
- highlight effective practice in child protection work; and
- drive improvements in forces' child protection practices.

The focus of the inspection is on the outcomes for, and experiences of, children who come into contact with the police when there are concerns about their safety or well-being.

The inspection methodology builds on the earlier multi-agency inspections. It comprises self-assessment and case audits carried out by the force, and case audits and interviews with police officers and staff and representatives from partner agencies, conducted by HMIC.¹

¹ Details of how we conduct these inspections can be found at Annex A.

3. Context for the force

Dyfed-Powys Police has approximately 1,806 staff. The workforce includes:

- 1,164 police officers;
- 501 police staff; and
- 141 police community support officers².

The force serves a population of over 488,000 across more than half of the land mass of Wales. The principle towns are Llanelli with a population of approximately 35,000 and Carmarthen with a population of approximately 16,000. Welsh is spoken by 30 percent of the population and the force treats the English and Welsh languages equally.

There are four local authorities in the Dyfed-Powys Police force area: Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and Powys. They are responsible for child protection within their boundaries. The force has four policing divisions and these are coterminous with the four local authority areas.

In Dyfed-Powys Police, services to protect vulnerable people are led by a detective superintendent, supported by a detective chief inspector and a detective inspector. They have responsibility for the central protecting vulnerable people (PVP) unit which includes:

- a central referral unit;
- a sex and violent offender unit;
- the co-ordination of multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA); and
- the co-ordination of the force's engagement with multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs).

They also have responsibility for four public protection units (PPUs), one in each of the police divisions. The PPUs are responsible for investigating child abuse, vulnerable adult abuse and domestic abuse.

At the time of the inspection in October 2014, Dyfed-Powys Police was actively negotiating with its partner agencies to establish one multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) to cover the force area.

² Police workforce, England and Wales, 30 September 2014, Home Office, January 2015, available at this link: www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-30-september-2014

4. The police role in child protection

The Welsh Government is responsible for child protection in Wales. The Welsh child protection system is similar to the system in England.

Under the Children Act 1989, the police service, working with partner agencies such as local authority children's social care services, health services and education services, is responsible for making enquiries to safeguard and secure the welfare of any child within their area who is suffering (or is likely to suffer) significant harm.³ The police are duty-bound to refer to the local authority those children in need they find in the course of their work.⁴ Welsh Government guidance⁵ outlines how these duties and responsibilities should be exercised.

The specified police roles set out in the guidance relate to:

- the identification of children who might be at risk from abuse and neglect;
- the investigation of alleged offences against children;
- their work with other agencies, particularly the requirement to share information that is relevant to child protection issues; and
- the exercise of emergency powers to protect children.

Every officer and member of police staff should understand their duty to protect children as part of their day-to-day business. It is essential that officers going into people's homes on any policing matter recognise the needs of children they may encounter. This is particularly important when they are dealing with domestic abuse and other incidents where violence may be a factor. The duty to protect children extends to children detained in police custody.

³ Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

⁴ Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 places a general duty on the local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their area who are believed to be 'in need'. Police may find children who are 'in need' when they attend incidents and should refer these cases to the local authority. A child is 'in need' if he or she is disabled, unlikely to achieve or have the opportunity to achieve a reasonable standard of health or development, or if their health and development is likely to be impaired without local authority service provision.

⁵ *Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004*, Welsh Government, February 2007 (latest update), available from: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/socialcare/guidance1/safeguardingunder2004act/?lang=en>

Many teams throughout police forces perform important roles in protecting children from harm, including those who analyse computers to establish whether they hold indecent images of children and others who manage registered sex offenders and dangerous people living in communities. They must visit sex offenders regularly, establish the nature of risk these offenders currently pose and put in place any necessary measures to mitigate that risk.

To ensure that agencies co-operate to keep children safe and look after their welfare, each local authority must establish a local safeguarding children board (LSCB)⁶. These arrangements will change in Wales in April 2016 when the LSCBs operating in each of the 22 individual local authority areas in Wales will be replaced with six safeguarding children boards⁷. In preparation for this change, a regional safeguarding children board operates for the Dyfed-Powys Police force area, encompassing all four local authority administrative areas. This is made up of senior representatives from all agencies (including the police). They promote safeguarding activities, ensure that the protection of children remains a high priority across their area, and hold each other to account.

⁶ LSCBs have a statutory duty, under the Children Act 2004, to co-ordinate how agencies work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. The functions of LSCBs in Wales are set out in the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (Wales) Regulations 2006, 2006 No. 1705 (W. 167), available from: www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2006/1705/made. The *All-Wales Child Protection Procedures*, All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group, 2008, provides guidance and informs child protection practice for LSCBs in Wales. The procedures are available at: www.awcpp.org.uk/home/wales-protocols/

⁷ Part 7 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, 2014 anaw 4, available from: www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/contents. The Welsh Government is consulting until 2 February 2015 on the arrangements for implementing Part 7 of the Act. Further information on this consultation is available from: <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/healthsocialcare/part7/?lang=en>

5. Findings: the experiences, progress and outcomes for children who need help and protection

During the course of the inspection, Dyfed-Powys Police audited 33 cases in accordance with criteria provided by HMIC. Although the force was not asked to rate each of the 33 self-assessed cases individually, practice was viewed as good by the force assessors in 21 of the cases, adequate in 6 cases and inadequate in 6 cases.⁸ Inspectors reviewed all 33 cases that had been self-assessed. They considered 12 cases to be good, 12 adequate and 9 inadequate. Overall, inspectors identified more weaknesses in practice than the self-assessors. Inspectors selected and examined a further 30 cases where children were identified as being at risk. Eight were assessed as good, eleven adequate and eleven inadequate.

Initial contact

In most of the cases examined by inspectors the force responded quickly to incidents when specific and clear concerns were raised about children. Police attended promptly, undertook a range of preliminary tasks such as ensuring the immediate safety of children, secured evidence and made an assessment about how best to proceed. It was clear from the cases examined that frontline staff understood vulnerability and their responsibilities for safeguarding. They worked well with other agencies to protect children and ensure their needs were met.

When further action was necessary, such as a joint visit with children's social care services, or where photographs of recent injuries or medical examinations were needed, this was arranged quickly. More often than not, officers undertook prompt and thorough initial enquires and used their power to arrest when necessary.

Examples included:

- the response to a report of a four-year-old girl seen wandering the streets inappropriately dressed. Officers attended immediately, found the girl and took her to a place of safety. They explored the circumstances and investigated, with children's social care services, concerns of child neglect and emotional abuse;

⁸ The case types and inspection methodology are set out in Annex A

- the action taken when police were called to a house where two children, aged three and seven-years-old, were found alone downstairs while their father was asleep upstairs, believed to be drunk. Police removed both children from the home and found bruising on the younger child. They took photographs of the injuries, asked sensitive questions of the elder child about their cause and immediately arrested the father; and
- the steps taken in a case involving concerns expressed by a mother about her 13-year-old daughter who had sent indecent pictures to, and had had conversations with, older men on her mobile phone. Officers engaged quickly with children's social care services. A joint visit was carried out within 24 hours of the call, evidence was seized for forensic examination and the girl was interviewed.

Inspectors found that staff in the force's control room were alert to risk and vulnerability and knew what to do, particularly in high-risk missing person cases. There were good examples of control room staff acting quickly, obtaining as much information as possible and passing the case to front line officers or a PPU to deal with. A regular training programme was in place to keep control room staff up-to-date with force and national developments, including safeguarding.

However, there was no police 'flag' on records for children who were subject to a child protection plan (i.e. they have already been identified as being at risk and a plan has been put in place to protect them). As a result, control room staff and frontline officers attending an incident may not be immediately aware if a protection plan exists for a child.

Generally, police attending an incident of domestic abuse checked that children were safe and well and ensured their immediate safety. However, in the six domestic abuse cases assessed by the inspectors, the behaviour and demeanour of the child had not been recorded. A child's demeanour, especially in those cases where a child is too young to speak to officers, or where to do so with a parent present might present a risk, provides important information about the impact of the incident on the child. It should inform both the initial assessment of the child's needs and whether there should be a referral to children's social care services.

We recommend that, within six months, Dyfed-Powys Police takes steps to ensure that all officers and staff dealing with a concern about children are aware of child protection plans and that this information informs their responses and risk assessments.

We recommend that, within three months, Dyfed-Powys Police ensures that officers always record their observations of a child's behaviour and demeanour in domestic abuse incident records, so that better assessments of a child's needs are made.

Assessment and help

The force has a central referral unit (CRU) which handles all referrals from police officers, children's social care services and other agencies in cases where there are concerns of child or adult abuse. The CRU is the focal point for information exchange. It manages large volumes of information, for the most part quickly and efficiently.

Initial enquiries were dealt with swiftly and strategy discussions⁹ were often held within an hour of the referral being received, when specialist staff were on duty. Inspectors were pleased to see the robust supervision of all cases referred into the CRU by trained and experienced child protection supervisors. Child abuse concerns were quickly identified and this enhanced the early investigative and safeguarding response. Inspectors were told that the establishment of the CRU had eased some of the pressure on child abuse investigators in the early stages of assessment and safeguarding and enabled them to give more attention to investigations.

All five cases examined by inspectors where children were reported missing from home were assessed as adequate. The immediate response from call-handlers and frontline staff to reports of missing children was often good, risks were assessed early and initial actions taken promptly to find the child. However, there was less evidence of follow-up action after the initial report and longer-term work to safeguard the child. In one case, a 15-year-old girl reported missing by her foster parent was quickly found by police at a party. Although a strategy discussion had taken place in April 2014, she had been reported missing on three further occasions since but, there was no evidence of a longer-term plan to protect her.

Inspectors also had concerns that the link between a child missing from home and the risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) was not routinely considered by staff. For example:

- a 14-year-old girl was reported missing 7 times by her mother. The girl had previously been found in a house with older men. Despite her mother repeatedly calling police and children's social care services for help, no inter-agency longer-term plans were in place to protect the girl from the obvious risks of CSE;

⁹ Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm there should be a strategy discussion involving local authority children's social care services, the police, health services and other bodies such as the referring agency. This might take the form of a multi-agency meeting or phone calls and more than one discussion may be necessary. A strategy discussion can take place following a referral or at any other time, including during the assessment process. *Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004*, Welsh Government, February 2007 (latest update), chapter 8, paragraphs 8.77 – 8.87.

- a 15-year-old girl living in foster care, reported missing on 12 occasions since 2012, was found with a 38-year-old man with whom she had been in a sexual relationship. She had previously spoken about being sexually involved with other older men. However, there was no record on the system to highlight the previous risk of CSE; and
- in this and a further case involving a 15-year-old girl in foster care who was also regularly reported missing, police records described the girls as ‘attention seekers’. This description left them exposed to further risks of sexual exploitation.

When a child is considered to be at risk of significant harm, an initial case conference¹⁰ will be arranged by children’s social care services where long-term plans for the child are discussed. Inspectors noted that all such initial conferences were attended by supervisors from the PVP unit. The presence of a police officer at these meetings, particularly a supervisor, is an important commitment to information sharing and collective decision making about children who are in need of help and protection.

Dyfed-Powys Police refers domestic abuse cases that are assessed as high risk by police or partners, and those involving cases that have previously been considered at the MARAC or Clare’s Law applications¹¹ to a MARAC for longer-term safeguarding plans to be put in place. MARACs were well attended by senior representatives from the force as well as from a wide range of agencies. Inspectors found that information was routinely shared to protect both victims and any children affected by domestic abuse. However, some practices varied across the force area. For example, in Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire, police did not receive a full record of the cases discussed and thus were not always aware of the outcome and subsequent plans of other agencies, and whether any further action was needed on their part.

¹⁰ Following section 47 enquiries (see chapter 4 above), an initial child protection conference brings together family members, the child where appropriate and those professionals most involved with the child and family, to make decisions about the child’s future safety, health and development. If concerns relate to an unborn child, consideration should be given as to whether to hold a child protection conference prior to the child’s birth. *Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004*, Welsh Government, February 2007 (latest update), chapter 8, paragraphs 8.110 – 8.142.

¹¹ Clare’s Law - the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme - is designed to provide victims with information that may protect them from an abusive situation before it ends in tragedy. The scheme allows the police to disclose information about a partner’s previous history of domestic violence or violent acts. The Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme is named after Clare Wood who was brutally murdered in 2009 by her former partner George Appleton, who had a record of violence against women.

Where there were concerns about sexual abuse, children had to travel long distances for medical examinations, sometimes at inappropriate times. This resulted in delays and additional distress for victims. For example, in one case a 4-year-old girl had to be taken to Cardiff for examination in the early hours of the morning, and in another case there was a delay of many hours for a 16-year-old girl before she was examined. This was attributed by the force to the lack of out-of-hours forensic paediatric services in the force area.

We recommend that, within three months, Dyfed-Powys Police takes steps to improve staff awareness of the links between children missing from home and the risk of sexual exploitation.

We recommend that, within three months, the force takes steps with partner agencies to ensure that timely forensic medical examinations are conducted in sexual abuse cases involving children.

Investigation

Inspectors found that child abuse investigations were initially dealt with in a timely manner. Safeguarding plans to protect a child from immediate harm were put in place quickly, thorough enquires were conducted and effective actions were taken. Management oversight was consistent and effective.

There were very good examples of child protection work, with child abuse investigators displaying a mix of investigative and protective approaches. They ensured that safeguarding remained central to their efforts while they pursued criminal investigative opportunities. For example, a ten-year-old boy told his teacher that his father regularly beat him with a stick. The boy was sensitively interviewed, medically examined the same day and taken into temporary foster care. During further investigation it became apparent that the father was physically and sexually abusing the boy's two younger brothers, who were eight and five-years-old. Evidence was gathered from the boys quickly and effectively and arrangements were made for children's social care services to provide ongoing support for the children.

While initial investigative responses were generally good, there was often significant drift in investigations, with unacceptable delays when further work was required. This was evident in around 40 percent of the cases examined, and in the 12 sexual abuse cases examined half were assessed as inadequate due to long delays in progressing further enquiries. Officers and supervisors recorded the need for more action on case files and noted that they were unable to pursue necessary lines of enquiry because of high workloads. For example:

- in November 2013, an allegation of sexual abuse of a 14-year-old boy was reported to police. Six months into the investigation the child expressed his frustrations about how long the matter was taking. Four months later the police prosecution file was still not ready to send to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) for a charging decision;
- in October 2013, a 16-year-old girl disclosed sexual abuse by her grandfather. After prompt initial work involving arrests and interviews, no further action was recorded until late December 2013 and the police prosecution file was not sent to the CPS until May 2014. At the time of the inspection (October 2014), police were still awaiting a charging decision from the CPS; and
- in September 2013, a ten-year-old boy found outside overnight told police he had been regularly beaten, kept short of food and frequently kept out of his home overnight by his mother over a number of years. Safeguarding measures were quickly put in place to protect the boy and his mother was arrested, interviewed and bailed. The police prosecution file was not sent to the CPS until May 2014 and, at the time of the inspection, CPS advice had still not been received. This was more than a year after the case was first reported to the police and the child had been in foster care since then.

Child abuse investigators told inspectors that their workloads were unmanageable and that this was preventing them from progressing investigations. They were frequently diverted from their allocated work to assist with video interviews of children or to handle cases involving vulnerable adults. All investigations were regularly monitored by supervisors and they expressed similar frustrations. Staff were highly committed and were focused on providing the best outcomes for children, but felt compromised due to their lack of capacity.

Delays in the examination and analysis of computers and other media undertaken by the high-tech crime unit (HTCU) also had an impact on investigations. For example, it took:

- over six months to analyse the phone of an alleged sex offender;
- over seven months to provide analysis and an evidential report on a computer and phone of an alleged offender said to have sexually assaulted a fourteen-year-old boy over a period of two years; and
- three months to examine a phone, and over ten months to examine the computer, of a man suspected of grooming and inciting sexual activity with two fifteen-year-old girls.

Inspectors found a backlog of work in the HTCUC. At the time of the inspection, 25 cases were waiting to be allocated, 19 of which related to sexual offences. The force used a risk assessment process to prioritise cases for examination: higher priority cases were dealt with in about ten weeks. The oldest case in the backlog had been awaiting examination for five months.

As some of the cases highlighted earlier demonstrate, there were also delays in cases sent to the CPS for review and prosecution decisions.

Delays are not in the best interests of children who are unable to put the incident behind them, and nor do they serve the suspect who may be on bail or in custody. When delays occur in evidence gathering, media analysis and receipt of charging decisions from CPS, as was seen in cases in this inspection, the length of time between the first call to police or children's social care services and a criminal justice outcome can be considerable.

Although Dyfed-Powys Police had developed an action plan to tackle CSE, the force's response was still largely reactive. Inspectors examined 13 cases involving CSE and found 6 to be inadequate. The force was slow to investigate and deal with the associated risks. There was no dedicated team for CSE and the majority of cases were dealt with by child abuse investigators within the PPU's. Inspectors saw very little evidence of development work with partners or proactive work by the force, such as intelligence gathering to identify the most vulnerable victims, suspects and 'hotspot' areas that young people and offenders frequent.

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police immediately:

- **takes steps to improve the standards of investigation to include a reduction in delays, regular auditing of investigations, and better senior management oversight to ensure these standards are being met; and**
- **identifies and reviews all child abuse investigation cases that have taken more than three months to investigate from the first report, and ensures that each child is supported and safeguarded, and that appropriate measures are in place to manage the risk posed by suspects.**

We recommend that, immediately, Dyfed-Powys Police takes steps to reduce delays in the high-tech crime unit.

We recommend that, within three months, Dyfed-Powys Police discusses with the CPS how best to reduce delays in the prosecution process so that the timeliness of submission of prosecution files by the police, and the timeliness of prosecution decisions, are regularly reviewed and improved.

Decision making

It is a very serious step to remove a child from his or her family by way of police protection.¹² In the sample of cases assessed that resulted in children being taken into police protection, inspectors considered that officers had exercised good judgement. One example involved a 15-year-old boy, living with his grandparents, who was frequently going missing. When police found him, he was very unhappy and uncooperative and did not want to go back to his grandparents. After listening to the child, making further enquires and taking into account information that the grandfather had alcohol problems, they made an informed decision to take the boy into police protection.

With the exception of cases involving children at risk of CSE, there was clear evidence that frontline staff made effective decisions in the early stages of a child protection matter. They took protective action, recorded the information and sent it promptly to the CRU. This information was then assessed by specialist trained child protection supervisors who made well-judged and timely decisions about referrals and strategy discussions involving other agencies. They initiated investigations when required and ensured that the appropriate people were involved.

When child abuse investigators and the CRU did not operate, in the evenings and on Saturdays, non-specialist staff (including neighbourhood policing teams and response officers¹³) took responsibility for responding to calls to the police concerning child protection. However, they could not access the child abuse investigation IT system where information on children, such as previous multi-agency involvement or whether they were subject to a child protection plan, was recorded. Consequently, important information to inform officers' decisions about the best action to take to safeguard children may have been missed.

Dyfed-Powys Police has two IT systems in which information relating to child abuse investigations is recorded, one specific to these investigations and a more general crime management system. These systems are not integrated. This creates extra work and some confusion about where the most recent details of an investigation might be found. Records were sometimes incomplete; for example, details of a

¹² Section 46(1) of the Children Act 1989 empowers a police officer, who has reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, (a) to remove the child to suitable accommodation and keep him/her there or (b) to take such steps as are reasonable to ensure that the child's removal from any hospital or other place in which he is then being accommodated is prevented.

¹³ A neighbourhood policing team is a team of police officers and police community support officers who predominantly patrol and are assigned to police a particular local community. Teams often comprise specialist officers and staff with expertise in crime prevention, community safety, licensing, restorative justice and schools liaison. A response officer is one assigned to deal with emergency and priority calls.

child's ethnicity, the school they attended and any disability or need for assistance with communication, were frequently missing. This is crucial information which should inform assessments and decisions.

Minutes of strategy meetings and case conferences were accessible on the child abuse investigation IT system and records were updated after these meetings so that information about the decisions made to protect children was immediately available to child abuse investigators.

We recommend that, within six months, Dyfed-Powys Police takes steps to ensure that relevant information is accessible, either directly or indirectly, to all officers and staff dealing with cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children.

Trusted adult

When the concern was serious and immediately recognised as a child protection incident, the approach to the child or parents (or social worker when the parent was a suspect) was carefully considered, and the best ways to engage with the child were explored. This sensitive approach resulted in stronger relationships between the child and police. Two examples of this involved:

- a referral received from a school that a 12-year-old girl with learning disabilities had been assaulted by her mother following an argument. A joint visit was made to the school by police and children's social care services. The girl was spoken to with the support of the school nurse, and her concerns listened to. Her special needs, and her wishes, were taken into account. She stayed with her mother, with the support of a social worker, while the investigation continued; and
- an emergency call received about the welfare of a 15-year-old girl after text messages were seen from her suggesting she may have taken an overdose of paracetamol. Officers immediately visited the girl's home and found her alone. They checked her welfare, confirmed that she had not yet taken any tablets and listened to her. Having heard the girl's concerns, officers encouraged her to share them with her parents and advised her to see her school counsellor. They subsequently spoke to her parents and arranged additional support for the family from children's social care services before closing the incident.

However, inspectors found that the significant delays in progressing child abuse investigations described earlier sometimes left the child and family feeling unsupported and caused them to lose confidence in the police. Although child abuse investigators were sensitive to the needs of the child, they told inspectors that they were unable to maintain the contact necessary to build a trusting relationship due to their workloads.

Inspectors found a number of cases where the decisions reached clearly took account of the views and needs of children, but there was very little information on the case files to record the views of the child, the impact of the issues in the case on the child or the outcomes of police intervention for the child. In Pembrokeshire, an effective model was in place where police and drug intervention workers visited known drug users who had young children, listened to their (and their children's) needs, tried to understand their problems and encouraged them into treatment.

Inspectors particularly noted the commitment of the force to engaging and building trust with children at both primary and secondary schools through dedicated schools' liaison officers¹⁴ who were alert and responsive to risk.¹⁵

We recommend that, within six months, Dyfed-Powys Police ensures that:

- **all staff record the views and concerns of children and any available outcomes at the end of police involvement in a case; and**
- **information about children's needs and views is regularly made available for consideration by the police and crime commissioner, and to service managers to inform future practice.**

Managing those posing a risk to children

Dyfed-Powys Police has a dedicated unit – the sex and violent offender unit - to manage registered sex offenders (RSOs). Inspectors found that information and intelligence were well managed and that plans to manage risks were all up to date. Monitoring visits to check that RSOs were keeping to their registration requirements were timely. Staff working in the team were clear about their responsibilities, undertook prompt and detailed enquires, assessed risk well and took action to

¹⁴ A police officer who works closely with schools, staff and pupils to promote positive relationships between the school and police service, with the aim of reducing anti-social behaviour and crime by focusing on early intervention and prevention.

¹⁵ The All Wales School Liaison Core Programme is a crime prevention programme funded jointly by the Welsh Government and the four Welsh police forces. Further information on the programme can be found in a review of the programme conducted by the Welsh Government in 2011 and available at the following link: <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/all-wales-school-liason-core-programme-evaluation-report/?lang=en>.

reduce it. They used their powers to arrest those who failed to keep to their registration conditions or other requirements, such as prohibitions on contact with children. In one example, officers conducted a home visit to an RSO following his release from prison and discovered that he had built up a relationship with two young children living next door. The officers immediately identified the risk, warned the offender and provided the family with enough information to allow them to protect their children.

Staff also communicated and worked well with other agencies, planning and undertaking enquiries jointly where appropriate. For example, officers identified that a sex offender no longer subject to registration was living with a new partner and seven-year-old boy. They held an early strategy discussion with children's social care services, warned his mother of the risks and carried out a joint visit to the boy at his school to check that he had not been harmed.

There were also good links between the sex and violent offender unit and neighbourhood policing teams who were aware of RSOs in their area. The neighbourhood teams proactively passed on information and assisted in building community intelligence. For example, a police community support officer spotted an RSO with previous convictions for rape holding hands with a woman of a similar age to his previous victim. The officer ensured that this new information was provided to the officers monitoring the RSO.

On most occasions officers took action against offenders, but in some cases this was unacceptably slow. The response was weaker in CSE cases, and in 4 of the 13 cases examined by inspectors, measures to tackle suspects were not pursued because of the reluctance of the child to support action by the police. This should not have prevented officers identifying the likely offenders, obtaining intelligence and determining the risk the likely offenders could pose to other children. For example, a 14-year-old girl at high risk of harm was found in the company of 3 known drug users. Although some safeguarding measures were put in place to protect the girl, there was no record to show that the suspects were spoken to or that consideration had been given to serving them with child abduction notices¹⁶. In another case, a 14-year-old girl told her father that a 23-year-old man had offered to buy her a pair of shoes in return for sex. The girl was unwilling to speak to police and they made no further enquires despite the obvious risk this man posed.

While police may have insufficient evidence to pursue a prosecution, they can still disrupt potential offenders' activities by, for example, keeping watch on areas where

¹⁶ A non-statutory notice issued when the police become aware of a child spending time with an adult who they believe could be harmful to them. A notice is used to disrupt the adult's association with the child or young person, as well as warning the adult that the association could result in arrest and prosecution.

vulnerable children are known to congregate or by issuing child abduction notices against identified suspects. Inspectors saw very little evidence of disruption activity and only seven child abduction notices had been issued by the force since September 2012.

We recommend that, within three months, Dyfed-Powys Police takes action to improve the identification, disruption and prosecution of those involved in CSE.

Police detention

Inspectors looked at 12 cases of children in detention. The youngest was 13 years old and the oldest 17. Five of the detainees were girls, aged 13, 15 and 17. Their arrests were for offences including robbery, burglary and assault. Three children had been detained under Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983. Inspectors judged two of the cases as good, seven adequate and three inadequate.

Dyfed-Powys Police self-assessed three of these cases, all featuring boys. They assessed two as good and one as inadequate. (In the Inspectors' assessments, one had been rated good and two inadequate.)

In most of the cases examined, the child had been subject to a thorough risk assessment by the custody officer before they were received into the custody suite. However, in the three cases assessed as inadequate by inspectors, there was insufficient information recorded on the custody records to show the rationale for decisions made about the child's detention.

In cases where a child is charged with a criminal offence and refused bail by the custody sergeant, it is the responsibility of the local authority to provide appropriate accommodation if the child is to be detained¹⁷. It should only be in exceptional circumstances that transfer to alternative accommodation is unlikely to be in the best interests of the child. In the 12 cases examined, 3 of the children were charged and refused bail. When officers requested alternative accommodation, none was available in the respective local authority area. In another of the cases examined, the child was transferred into the care of the local authority. However, no suitable local authority accommodation was available and a social worker spent the night with the 15-year-old child at the police station.

When a child is held in police cells rather than local authority accommodation, the custody officer should complete a certificate to present to the court explaining the

¹⁷ Under section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 a custody officer must secure the move of a child to local authority accommodation unless he certifies it is impracticable to do so or, for those aged 12 or over, no secure accommodation is available and local authority accommodation would not be adequate to protect the public from serious harm from him.

circumstances.¹⁸ Inspectors found two cases where this certificate had not been completed.

Section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 allows a police officer to remove an apparently mentally disordered person from a public place to a place of safety. Although a place of safety can include a police custody suite, this should only be used in exceptional circumstances and it is preferable for them to be taken directly to health facilities such as a hospital¹⁹. Nonetheless, children detained under this power in Dyfed-Powys were usually taken to police custody suites, although the force was unable to provide the number of children affected during the last two years. Inspectors were told by custody staff that this was due to the lack of suitable medical facilities within the force area.

Inspectors were concerned about a case involving a 17-year-old girl with a history of depression and self-harming who was violent when detained under the Mental Health Act. Incapacitant spray²⁰ and limb restraints were used to subdue the girl and she was placed in a self-harm suit to restrict her movement and prevent her from harming herself. No rationale was recorded for why these measures were necessary for a young person with known vulnerabilities.

Dyfed-Powys Police was working with local health services to introduce early access to a dedicated mental health nurse to support children and young people with mental health problems and divert them from custody. Implementation of this scheme was planned for the end of October 2014.

Inspectors found that the majority of custody staff lacked awareness and knowledge of child protection and CSE. They told inspectors that they had not received training on safeguarding, child protection or CSE, or on what to do if they suspected a child was vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Nor was significant information about children, such as risks of CSE or whether a child was subject to a child protection plan, readily available to custody staff.

We recommend that, within three months, Dyfed-Powys Police undertakes a review (jointly with children’s social care services and other relevant agencies)

¹⁸ Section 38(6) and (7) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

¹⁹ *Mental Health Act 1983: Code of practice for Wales*, Welsh Government, 2008, paragraph 7.18. www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/816/Mental%20Health%20Act%201983%20Code%20of%20Practice%20for%20Wales.pdf

²⁰ CS (Corson and Staughton) spray is discharged from a canister by police officers and used as a temporary incapacitant to subdue attackers or people who are violently aggressive. It is a harmless spray that wears off and leaves no damage. Police officers are regularly trained in its use and are required to follow national guidance. www.acpo.police.uk/documents/uniformed/2009/200905UNGIS01.pdf

of how it manages the detention of children. This review should include, as a minimum, how best to:

- **ensure, with partner agencies, that children detained under section 136 of the Mental Health Act are only detained in police custody in exceptional circumstances;**
- **provide training for custody staff to improve their awareness of child vulnerability, child protection and CSE;**
- **assess at an early stage the need for alternative accommodation, and work with children's social care services to secure transfers where this is required; and**
- **ensure that custody staff record all actions and decisions with a clear rationale if children are detained in police custody and comply with statutory duties, completing detention certificates where required.**

6. Findings: leadership, management and governance

Protecting vulnerable people is a priority in the police and crime plan for Dyfed-Powys Police.²¹ The plan sets out a commitment to ‘ensur[e] effective working practices are in place to manage increasing demand, particularly in respect of child protection referrals, sex offender management and reports of domestic abuse and hate crime’.²²

At the time of the inspection, the force was in the process of strengthening the PVP unit through the recruitment of eight additional staff, although only three would be child abuse investigators. Centralised management of the four divisionally-based PPU was leading to more consistent practice, and providing greater flexibility and resilience, while retaining local services.

The force has invested time and resources in training frontline officers, who have a good understanding of their role in safeguarding and of when and how to refer incidents to the CRU. This training now needs to be extended to custody staff to build their awareness and knowledge of child protection and CSE. Inspectors observed the effectiveness of a daily ‘briefing wall’ (an electronic briefing system accessed by all officers when they come on duty). This provided information on vulnerable children at risk and specific sex offenders in local areas to frontline staff. The system was also used to identify and allocate action and was regularly updated so all staff could see what had been done. For example, inspectors saw a request for a high-risk domestic abuse victim to be visited and a note confirming that this action had been completed.

Inspectors noted the impact of experienced child protection supervisors working in the CRU in the strength of the initial investigative work and safeguarding response. They efficiently identified the issues involved, and the action and enquiries required to progress child abuse cases referred to the unit.

At the time of the inspection, the force was working with the four local authorities in its area to establish a MASH. Progress had been slow, although as a precursor Carmarthenshire County Council had recently provided a staff member to work in the CRU. This was a positive step to support early information sharing and improve risk assessments. A Barnardo's worker was also located in the CRU for two days each week to improve early identification of the risk of CSE for children who were regularly

²¹The Dyfed-Powys Police and Crime Plan for 2013-18 can be accessed at: www.dyfed-powys.pcc.police.uk/document-library/priorities-and-policies/police-and-crime-plan-final-designed.pdf

²² Ibid, page 10.

reported missing from home. This was an encouraging development and the force and its partners will want to monitor closely the impact on outcomes for children.

Specialist staff responsible for managing child abuse investigations were knowledgeable, dedicated and wanted to provide the best possible outcomes for children at risk of harm. Many had completed the specialist child abuse investigator development programme but there were still a number of staff awaiting specialist training.

There was evidence of good supervisory oversight and direction setting in these investigations, with regular reviews and reasons for delays recorded by supervisors. However, inspectors found too many cases with unacceptable delays which were having an impact on the standard of service. A number of specialist staff expressed concerns about their demanding workloads and this was cited on case files as the reason for lack of progress in some cases.

Inspectors were told that paediatric forensic services were not readily accessible for child victims in cases of suspected sexual abuse. This resulted in children being examined at inappropriate times and having to travel long distances. Inspectors did not find evidence that this issue had been escalated and addressed by senior officers.

The HTCUC had been incorporated into a new digital communications and cyber-crime unit, which had been established shortly before the inspection. This brought additional capacity, but also a wider remit. The backlog of work, and delays in the analysis and subsequent evidential products derived from computers and other media devices, need to be addressed as part of the development of this new team.

Recording systems for child abuse and crime management were not well integrated and this did not support child abuse investigators. Duplicate entering of information was common place and, where this was not done, staff did not always have all the information they needed to make good decisions.

Officers were attending all initial child protection conferences. This is indicative of the commitment of the force to child protection which was acknowledged by the local authority directors of children's services with whom HMIC inspectors spoke and by the chair of the regional safeguarding children board.

The recently established regional board provides a forum for all four local authorities and partners to come together to ensure the effectiveness of local arrangements and services to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This is a positive step towards developing a more integrated and consistent approach across the force area. The police were fully engaged with the work to develop the regional board, particularly with establishing the priorities and arrangements for the coordination and quality assurance of the safeguarding activities of member agencies.

The detention of children (with or without mental health problems) in police custody rather than alternative accommodation, and the lack of forensic paediatric services are matters which Dyfed-Powys Police should raise at the regional safeguarding children board. Detention in police cells was identified as an issue in a previous inspection²³ and inspectors were told that the PCC had recently written to the chief executives of the four local authorities in the force area about their responsibility to provide alternative accommodation for children.

It was clear that the force was starting to recognise the diverse communities that it serves, including the Polish community and military families resident in the force area. The area is a significant holiday destination and the force had delivered training to the leisure industry on safeguarding and recognising behaviours of concern. Inspectors regarded this as good practice.

The force actively engaged with arrangements for managing high-risk offenders and MAPPA, and inspectors saw systematic information sharing and inter-agency plans to manage risk. There was regular attendance at meetings by officers of an appropriate seniority. Safeguarding issues were identified and considered.

Performance and other data to help develop services were limited. The force monitored numbers of incidents and cases, for example, the number of child abuse referrals and domestic abuse incidents with children present. But there was little information about positive outcomes for children to help identify areas for improvement. This needs to be addressed. Management information relating to timescales for action and decisions should also be collated and made available to staff.

Inspectors saw little evidence of internal audits of child protection work, and noted a lack of detail and critical analysis in many of the cases the force assessed for this inspection. However, the force had been involved in a number of child practice reviews²⁴ and held learning events for staff to disseminate good practice. The learning and agreed recommendations from reviews were regularly published on an internal website managed by the PVP unit. This included an action plan to monitor progress against recommendations. A multi-agency group, set up to monitor the handling of rape and serious sexual offence cases, also provided scrutiny.

²³ *Dyfed-Powys – Joint inspection of police custody*, HM Inspectorate of Prisons and HM Inspectorate of Constabulary, October 2013. Available from: www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmic/publication/dyfed-powys-joint-inspection-of-police-custody-suites/

²⁴ Multi-agency reviews that take place after a child has died or is seriously injured to learn lessons and help prevent similar incidents happening in the future.

Dyfed-Powys Police had developed an action plan for CSE, and although much of the force's work on CSE was reactive, work was underway at the time of the inspection to build a picture of prevalence and risk. The force had collaborated with other Welsh police forces and the Welsh Rugby Union to develop a CSE awareness campaign which included a podcast on the force's intranet. Nevertheless, multi-agency arrangements to tackle CSE were not well developed. The force needs to make full use of its powers to disrupt and prosecute those involved in CSE. It also needs to work with partners to develop a more proactive and preventive approach to protect children at risk.

7. Findings: The overall effectiveness of the force and its response to children who need help and protection

Dyfed-Powys Police demonstrated commitment to improving child protection services. It has a central team who provide leadership and direction and who drive a number of consistent and effective practices across the force. However, more needs to be done to reduce the significant delays in investigations and ensure that the force can deal with the demands placed on it. The large geographical area policed by the force poses an extra challenge as specialist officers are spread thinly and often travel lengthy distances on rural roads during their work.

Supervisory oversight for child protection was good, with experienced and skilled staff in the CRU initiating effective safeguarding responses, and committed and knowledgeable managers overseeing the day-to-day work in the four PPU's. Staff responsible for child abuse investigations were highly committed and hard working, but their heavy workloads were having a direct impact on the quality of investigations and the service provided to child victims and their families. Although the force had recognised the need for more staff, only three additional investigators had been allocated for child abuse.

When an incident was recognised by officers as a child protection matter they responded well, both in terms of taking police action and working with children's social care services to safeguard children, but the force needs to improve its response once the initial crisis has passed. It also needs to work with other agencies to develop a more proactive approach to tackling CSE and should be more alert to potential risk and harm in less obvious cases, for example, potential CSE cases involving teenagers reluctant to co-operate.

The force had clearly made efforts to improve the ability of frontline staff to recognise that children may be at risk of abuse or neglect, but awareness was low among those working in custody. Knowledge and understanding of CSE varied, despite a campaign with the Welsh Rugby Union.

A performance framework that focuses more on the outcomes for children who need protection (rather than the number of cases processed) should be developed in order for the force to improve and progress its child protection work.

Dyfed-Powys Police has good working relationships with the four local authorities and other services that operate across the force area. However, more needs to be done through joint working to deliver better services, in particular in respect of children in custody, forensic paediatric examination, children with mental health problems and those at risk of CSE.

8. Recommendations

Immediately

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police:

- takes steps to improve the standards of investigation to include a reduction in delays, regular auditing of investigations, and better senior management oversight to ensure these standards are being met; and
- identifies and reviews all child abuse investigation cases that have taken more than three months to investigate from the first report, and ensures that each child is supported and safeguarded, and that appropriate measures are in place to manage the risk posed by suspects.

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police takes steps to reduce delays in the high-tech crime unit.

Within three months

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police ensures that officers always record their observations of a child's behaviour and demeanour in domestic abuse incident records, so that better assessments of a child's needs are made.

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police takes steps to improve staff awareness of the links between children being missing from home and the risk of sexual exploitation.

We recommend that the force takes steps with partner agencies to ensure that timely forensic medical examinations are conducted in sexual abuse cases involving children.

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police discusses with the CPS how best to reduce delays in the prosecution process so that the timeliness of submission of prosecution files by the police, and the timeliness of prosecution decisions, are regularly reviewed and improved.

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police takes action to improve the identification, disruption and prosecution of those involved in CSE.

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police undertakes a review (jointly with children's social care services and other relevant agencies) of how it manages the detention of children. This review should include, as a minimum, how best to:

- ensure, with partner agencies, that children detained under section 136 of the Mental Health Act are only detained in police custody in exceptional circumstances;
- provide training for custody staff to improve their awareness of child vulnerability, child protection and CSE;
- assess at an early stage the need for alternative accommodation, and work with children's social care services to secure transfers where this is required; and
- ensure that custody staff record all actions and decisions with a clear rationale if children are detained in police custody and comply with statutory duties, completing detention certificates where required.

Within six months

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police takes steps to ensure that all officers and staff dealing with a concern about children are aware of child protection plans and that this information informs their responses and risk assessments.

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police takes steps to ensure that relevant information is accessible, either directly or indirectly, to all officers and staff dealing with cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children.

We recommend that Dyfed-Powys Police ensures that:

- all staff record the views and concerns of children and any available outcomes at the end of police involvement in a case; and
- information about children's needs and views is regularly made available for consideration by the police and crime commissioner, and to service managers to inform future practice.

9. Next steps

Within six weeks of the publication of this report, HMIC will require an update of the action being taken to respond to the recommendations that should be acted upon immediately.

Dyfed-Powys Police should also provide an action plan within six weeks to specify how it intends to respond to the other recommendations made in this report.

Subject to the responses received, HMIC will revisit the force no later than six months after the publication of this report to assess how it is managing the implementation of all of the recommendations.

Annex A

Child protection inspection methodology

Objectives

The objectives of the inspection are:

- to assess how effectively police forces safeguard children at risk;
- to make recommendations to police forces for improving child protection practice;
- to highlight effective practice in child protection work; and
- to drive improvements in forces' child protection practices.

The expectations of agencies are set out in the statutory guidance *Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004*²⁵. The specific police roles set out in the guidance are:

- the identification of children who might be at risk from abuse and neglect;
- investigation of alleged offences against children;
- inter-agency working and information-sharing to protect children; and
- the exercise of emergency powers to protect children.

These areas of practice are the focus of the inspection.

Inspection approach

Inspections focused on the experience of and outcomes for, the child following its journey through child protection and criminal investigation processes. They assessed how well the service has helped and protected children and investigated alleged criminal acts, taking account of, but not measuring compliance with, policies and guidance.

²⁵ *Safeguarding Children: Working Together Under the Children Act 2004*, Welsh Government, February 2007 (latest update), available from: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/socialcare/guidance1/safeguardingunder2004act/?lang=en>

The inspections considered how the arrangements for protecting children, and the leadership and management of the police service, contributed to and supported effective practice on the ground. The team considered how well management responsibilities for child protection, as set out in the statutory guidance, were met.

Methods

- Self-assessment – practice, and management and leadership.
- Case inspections.
- Discussions with staff from within the police and from other agencies.
- Examination of reports on significant case reviews or other serious cases.
- Examination of service statistics, reports, policies and other relevant written materials.

The purpose of the self-assessment is to:

- raise awareness within the service about the strengths and weaknesses of current practice (this formed the basis for discussions with HMIC); and
- serve as a driver and benchmark for future service improvements.

Self-assessment and case inspection

In consultation with police services the following areas of practice have been identified for scrutiny:

- domestic abuse;
- incidents where police officers and staff identify children in need of help and protection, e.g. children being neglected;
- information-sharing and discussions regarding children potentially at risk of harm;
- the exercising of powers of police protection under section 46 of the Children Act 1989 (taking children into a 'place of safety');
- the completion of Section 47 Children Act 1989 enquiries, including both those of a criminal nature and those of a non-criminal nature (Section 47 enquiries are those relating to a child 'in need' rather than a 'child at risk');
- sex offender management;
- the management of missing children;

- child sexual exploitation; and
- the detention of children in police custody.

Below is a breakdown of the type of self-assessed cases we examined in Dyfed-Powys police force.

Type of case	Number of cases
Child protection enquiry (s. 47)	5
Domestic abuse	5
General concerns with a child where a referral to children's social care services was made	5
Sex offender enquiry	3
Missing children	3
Police protection	3
At risk of sexual exploitation	3
On-line sexual abuse	3
Child in custody	3

Annex B Glossary

child	person under the age of eighteen
multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)	locally-held meeting where statutory and voluntary agency representatives come together and share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse; any agency can refer an adult or child whom they believe to be at high risk of harm; the aim of the meeting is to produce a co-ordinated action plan to increase an adult or child's safety, health and well-being; the agencies that attend will vary but are likely to include, for example: the police, probation, children's, health and housing services; there are over 250 currently in operation across England and Wales
multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)	entity in which public sector organisations with common or aligned responsibilities in relation to the safety of vulnerable people work; the hubs comprise staff from organisations such as the police and local authority social services; they work alongside one another, sharing information and co-ordinating activities to help protect the most vulnerable children and adults from harm, neglect and abuse

multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)

arrangements set out in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 for assessing and managing the risk posed by certain sexual and violent offenders; require local criminal justice agencies and other bodies dealing with offenders to work together in partnership to reduce the risk of further serious violent or sexual offending by these offenders

police and crime commissioner (PCC)

elected entity for a police area, established under section 1, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, responsible for securing the maintenance of the police force for that area and securing that the police force is efficient and effective; holds the relevant chief constable to account for the policing of the area; establishes the budget and police and crime plan for the police force; appoints and may, after due process, remove the chief constable from office

registered sex offender

a person required to provide his details to the police because he has been convicted or cautioned for a sexual offence as set out in Schedule 3 to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, or because he has otherwise triggered the notification requirements (for example, by being made subject to a sexual offences prevention order); as well as personal details, a registered individual must provide the police with details about his movements, for example he must tell the police if he is going abroad and, if homeless, where he can be found; registered details may be accessed by the police, probation and prison service