

# National Child Protection Inspections

Gwent Police  
4–15 February 2019

June 2019

© HMICFRS 2019

ISBN: 978-1-78655-832-9

[www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs](http://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs)

## 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, though, too many children are abused or neglected by those responsible for their care; or need to be protected from other adults. Some of them occasionally go missing, or end up spending time in places, or with people, that are harmful to them.

While it is everyone's responsibility to look out for vulnerable children, police forces – working together and with other organisations – have a particular role in protecting children and meeting their needs.

Protecting children is one of the most important things the police do. Police officers investigate suspected crimes involving children, arrest perpetrators and have a significant role in monitoring sex offenders. A police officer can take a child in danger to a place of safety and can seek restrictions on offenders' contact with children. The police service also has a significant role, working with other organisations, in ensuring children's protection and wellbeing in the longer term.

As they go about their daily tasks, police officers must be alert to, and identify, children who may be at risk. To protect children effectively, officers must talk to children, listen to them, and understand their fears and concerns. The police must also work effectively with other organisations to play their part in ensuring that, as far as possible, no child slips through the net, and to avoid both over-intrusiveness and duplication of effort.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) 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 the police protect children and secure improvements for the future.

# Contents

<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>7</b>
The police's responsibility to keep children safe .....	7
Expectations set out in the <i>All Wales Child Protection Procedures</i> .....	7
<b>2. Context for the force</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>3. Leadership, management and governance</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>4. Case file analysis</b> .....	<b>14</b>
Results of case file reviews .....	14
Breakdown of case file audit results by area of child protection .....	15
<b>5. Initial contact</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>6. Assessment and help</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>7. Investigation</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>8. Decision-making</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>9. Trusted adult</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>10. Managing those posing a risk to children</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>11. Police detention</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>47</b>
The overall effectiveness of the force and its response to children who need help and protection .....	47
Next steps.....	48
<b>Annex A – Child protection inspection methodology</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Annex B – Definitions and interpretations</b> .....	<b>51</b>

## Summary

This report is a summary of the findings of our inspection of police child<sup>1</sup> protection services in Gwent, which took place in February 2019.

We examined the effectiveness of the decisions made by the police at each stage of their interactions with or for children, from initial contact through to the investigation of offences. We also scrutinised the treatment of children in custody, and assessed how the force is structured, led and governed in relation to its child protection services.<sup>2</sup>

### Main findings from the inspection

We found that the chief constable, his senior team and the PCC are clearly committed to protecting vulnerable people, including children. This shows in both the PCC's police and crime plan and the force's priorities.

We found strong evidence of senior officers working to improve how the force manages the risks to children, and to meet the continued increase in demand for child protection. For instance, the force is going to add 30 more investigators to the public protection unit (PPU). The unit will also be restructured so that it can cope with demand.

Throughout the inspection, we found examples of good work by frontline officers responding to incidents involving children. Officers and staff we spoke to who manage child protection investigations are committed and dedicated. They often work in difficult and demanding circumstances.

Gwent Police has put a lot of time and energy into safeguarding the health and wellbeing of its staff. The force has a wellbeing strategy, and uses annual psychological screening to assess the health and wellbeing of its public protection staff. Staff can also use an external counselling service. Further support is offered through a mental health peer group and trained mental health ambassadors.

Partner agencies such as local authority children's social care services and members of the local safeguarding children's board told us that joint working arrangements were strong and effective. They also said that the police were actively involved and open to constructive professional challenge. Although we found that some joint working arrangements required further development, this is positive feedback for the force.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Child' in this report refers to a person under the age of 18. See Annex A for this and other definitions.

<sup>2</sup> For more information on HMICFRS's rolling programme of child protection inspections, see [our website](#).

The case audits that formed part of this inspection highlight a need to improve some of the force's responses to children in need of help and protection. The force has made the protection of children a priority. Senior leaders are clearly committed to this policy. However, decisions about children at risk are not yet consistently better as a result.

Specific areas for improvement include:

- ensuring that officers speak to children, watch how they appear and behave, and make sure their concerns and views are heard, so as to help shape decisions made about them;
- the way the force records, assesses and shares information with partner agencies, particularly children's social care;
- how information relating to investigative activity and protective plans is recorded;
- supervision of investigations to make sure that investigative opportunities are pursued, activity is co-ordinated and there are no unnecessary delays;
- the practices used when managing those who pose a risk to children; and
- the treatment of children while detained in police custody.

In addition, while the force monitors the number of child protection incidents and cases, it has only limited data about the quality of outcomes. This makes it hard for the force to know whether officers and staff are consistently making the best decisions for vulnerable children.

However, we did see areas of strong practice.

- One specific area was the first point of contact (FPOC) with the force via the communications centre. We found that call takers and despatchers were good at identifying risk, thanks to the way the control room operated. There was good use of flags on systems to alert attending officers to important issues. We saw many examples of when this research was passed to attending officers. As a result, they were well informed and better able to make effective decisions.
- For joint investigations, details of strategy discussions were well recorded. When completed by specialist officers and staff, these investigations were usually well supervised and conducted.
- Investigations into those offenders who make and distribute indecent images of children were timely and child focused.

- The training given to Gwent Police officers and staff was good. A further five training days per year allowed for continuing professional development.

During our inspection, we examined 80 cases where the police had identified children at risk. We assessed the force's child protection practice as good in 20 cases, as requiring improvement in 37 cases and as inadequate in 23 cases. This shows that the force needs to do more to make sure that it provides a consistently good service for all children.

## **Conclusion**

Senior leaders of Gwent Police are determined to protect vulnerable children. They have made it a priority to protect those in need of support.

Our inspection found that the officers and staff who manage child abuse investigations were committed and dedicated, while often working in difficult and demanding circumstances. However, in too many cases, we also found that practice and decision making were inconsistent. The force needs to do more to make sure that the commitment of senior officers to improving the service leads to better outcomes in all cases.

We were encouraged to note that the force was already acting to address gaps in service that it had identified in its own audits before our inspection. It also took prompt action to address many of the issues we raised during the inspection. This is positive and underlines the commitment of senior leaders to continually improve the service provided to vulnerable children.

We have made recommendations that, if acted on, will help to improve outcomes for children. We will revisit the force, no later than six months after this report is published, to assess how it is responding to those recommendations.

# 1. Introduction

## The police's responsibility to keep children safe

Under the Children Act 1989, a police constable is responsible for taking into police protection any child whom they have reasonable cause to believe would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm, and the police have a duty to inquire into that child's case.<sup>3</sup> Under the Children Act 2004, the police must also ensure that, when carrying out their functions, they have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.<sup>4</sup>

Every officer and member of police staff should understand that it is their duty to protect children, as part of day-to-day policing. Officers going into people's homes on any policing matter must recognise the needs of the children they may meet and understand what they can and should do to protect them. This is particularly important when they are dealing with domestic abuse or other incidents that may involve violence. The duty to protect children includes any children who are detained in police custody.

In 2018, the National Crime Agency's strategic assessment of serious and organised crime established that child sexual abuse and exploitation is one of the gravest serious and organised crime risks.<sup>5</sup> Child sexual abuse is also one of the six national threats specified in the *Strategic Policing Requirement*.<sup>6</sup>

## Expectations set out in the *All Wales Child Protection Procedures*

The statutory guidance, the [All Wales Child Protection Procedures](#), sets out what is expected of all partner organisations involved in child protection.

The provision of social care services is a devolved responsibility in Wales. As a result, the Welsh Government is responsible for child protection. 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. The police

---

<sup>3</sup> Children Act 1989, section 46.

<sup>4</sup> Children Act 2004, section 11.

<sup>5</sup> [National Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime](#), National Crime Agency, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> The [Strategic Policing Requirement](#) was first issued in 2012 in execution of the Home Secretary's statutory duty (in accordance with section 37A of the Police Act 1996, as amended by section 77 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011) to set out the national threats and the appropriate national policing capabilities needed to counter those threats. Five threats were identified: terrorism; civil emergencies; organised crime; threats to public order; and a national cyber security incident. In 2015, the *Strategic Policing Requirement* was reissued including child sexual abuse as an additional national threat.

are duty bound to refer to the local authority those children in need whom they find during their work. The Welsh Government guidance 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;
- the force's 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. These areas of practice are the focus of our child protection inspections.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Details of how we conduct these inspections can be found at Annex A.



## 2. Context for the force

- Gwent Police employs 1,779 people:<sup>8</sup>
- 1,154 police officers;
- 495 police staff; and
- 130 police community support officers.

Gwent Police has two policing areas: East and West. Specialist safeguarding resources are located at police stations within the two areas, with some centralised functions located at the Police HQ in Cwmbran.

The two areas are aligned to five local authorities covering 1,554 square kilometres with a population of 577,800. The county is economically and culturally diverse, with areas of both affluence and deprivation.

The force area has rural towns, countryside and urban areas including the city of Newport. High volumes of traffic using the M4 and large regeneration projects bring benefits and complexities.

From 1 April 2013, the South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board (SEWSCB) replaced the five former Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs)<sup>9</sup> in Newport, Torfaen, Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly. The SEWSCB is responsible for co-ordinating multi-agency safeguarding across the region and for ensuring that outcomes for children and young people across the five local authority areas are continuously improved.

An assistant chief constable (ACC) is responsible for child protection throughout the force area. She is supported by a chief superintendent, who is the head of the crime department. A detective superintendent is head of the PPU and has strategic oversight for protecting children and vulnerable adults. Local policing area commanders retain operational responsibility for the specialist teams in their area.

---

<sup>8</sup> [Police workforce, England and Wales: 30 September 2017](#), Home Office, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> LSCBs have a statutory duty, under the Children Act 2004, to co-ordinate how organisations work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and make sure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

### 3. Leadership, management and governance

#### **There is a clear commitment to child protection among the chief officers' team and senior leaders**

The PCC's crime and policing plan<sup>10</sup> has five priorities in which the protection of children and other vulnerable groups is prominent. The plan is currently under review to reflect emerging risks such as criminal exploitation of children.

The force's priorities mirror those of the PCC. Greater focus is placed on types of crime that have been identified as the greatest threat to communities in Gwent. Issues relating to child protection are prominent. They include child sexual exploitation (CSE), modern slavery and human trafficking, domestic abuse and children who go missing with high-risk indicators.

The ACC leads the force's work on child protection and on the child-centred policing action plan.<sup>11</sup>

The force is also heavily involved in the Early Action Together programme. This national project, funded by the Home Office, seeks answers to address the lack of early intervention and preventative activity when adverse childhood experiences are evident.

The force reviewed the crime department and found that it needed more officers to deal with vulnerability generally, therefore including child protection. There are plans for 30 more investigators for the PPU. A consultation is looking at how these investigators can be best deployed.

#### **There is good structured oversight at strategic and operational levels**

The head of crime chairs a monthly vulnerability meeting where senior leaders can monitor performance, continuous improvement and the quality of investigations in respect of child protection.

This meeting reports to a monthly operational effectiveness and efficiency board that is chaired by the ACC.

---

<sup>10</sup> The PCC has a statutory obligation to issue a [police and crime plan](#) within the financial year in which they are elected. This plan sets out the policing priorities for Gwent over the PCC's term of office.

<sup>11</sup> [National strategy for the policing of children & young people](#), NPCC, 2015.

PPU managers attend daily force and management meetings where child protection issues are discussed. These meetings oversee the force's operational response to matters of most threat, risk and harm.

## **The force contributes to partnership working arrangements**

Partner agencies say their professional relationships with the force – both at strategic level and on the ground – are good. They can engage and challenge the force when necessary. The force has appropriate representation on the SEWSCB and is involved in various subgroups. However, some aspects of joint working require further development. These include the understanding of statutory thresholds for intervention when referring a case to children's social care services.

Working with five separate local authority areas can pose problems. The force is working hard to engage all of them in better joint working arrangements.

## **Specially trained officers mostly lead child protection investigations but we found vacancies in some teams**

PPU specialist officers conduct child protection enquiries when a child under 13 is the victim of a sexual offence, when there is abuse in a family setting or if the offender is in a position of trust. The Quartz teams, which are part of the PPUs in each area, deal with cases of CSE.

We found some vacancies within these teams, particularly in the West force area. As a result, we have seen, through case audits, unnecessary delays in some investigations. However, we understand the force intended to fill these vacancies by March 2019.

Recognising the need for visible leadership, senior leaders have moved two detective chief inspectors from centrally located roles to lead the PPUs in the local policing areas. This is a recent decision, but officers and staff already see the benefits of more visible senior leadership. They told us that they feel more supported and that leaders recognise the pressures they are under.

## **The force provides regular training for its officers and staff but not for those working in custody**

During their basic training, newly appointed officers receive guidance on child protection issues such as CSE, domestic abuse and children who go missing. The force also allocates five days per year for face-to-face training for an officer's continual professional development. This can include any area of policing, but PPU leaders are able to influence the training officers receive. So, in the past year, staff

have received additional training from specialists about domestic abuse, modern slavery and CSE.

This training is provided to frontline and specialist staff. Staff within custody offices do not routinely receive the same training. Therefore, they may not be as informed about current child protection issues as other staff.

The force contributes to free joint training arranged by the SEWSCB for all professionals working with children. Although some officers and staff benefit from attending, it is not co-ordinated through the learning and development department. Central co-ordination could give the force an opportunity to make better use of this training.

## **Performance information to understand outcomes for children requires further development**

Senior leaders currently see only quantitative data reported at the vulnerability meeting. The force does not undertake routine internal safeguarding audits to assess the nature and quality of operational practice when vulnerable children are encountered.

In the month before our inspection, area PPU detective chief inspectors had begun to dip sample the work of their officers to better understand performance. This is encouraging. This process has already helped the force to identify a weakness in the response to missing children with officers often grading cases as medium risk without a clear rationale. But the initiative is new and currently lacks defined terms of reference and a governance structure or framework.

Senior leaders therefore cannot be certain that officers and staff are consistently making the best decisions for vulnerable children. The force needs to do more to check that decisions being made about children are in line with its expectations.

## **There is evidence that the force recognises the many facets of abuse and exploitation, and is working in partnership to protect children**

The force recently undertook Operation Divide, aimed at disrupting those involved in organised criminality. Before the operation, a multi-agency safeguarding team was established involving children's social care, an education representative and a police officer. Every team executing search warrants had a nominated safeguarding officer who was briefed about reporting any children present to the multi-agency team. This meant that prompt protective plans could be developed for the children of those arrested, with a greater understanding of their experiences.

We saw the team dealing with online child abuse starting to use a similar approach. They invite social workers to be involved in planning some of their work. They also encourage social workers to join their visits to the homes of those suspected of being involved in the making and distributing of indecent images of children.

Working together in this way provides better protection for vulnerable children through improved relationships between partner agencies and more timely interventions.

## **Gwent Police officers and staff are dedicated and enthusiastic**

We found that all the officers and staff we spoke to were engaged with the inspection process. Without exception, they were friendly, polite and enthusiastic to talk about their work.

The officers and staff we spoke to who manage child-related investigations are committed and dedicated. Their work is often difficult and demanding. Some specialist officers were worried that they often worked very long hours, with not enough staff to deal with the number of cases. Some staff also felt there was a lack of recognition or reward for their effort.

## **The force has invested a significant amount of time and energy in the health and wellbeing of its staff**

Through its wellbeing strategy, the force supports various schemes to improve and maintain the health and wellbeing of its officers and staff. PPU personnel complete psychological screening questionnaires every year. When concerns are identified, they are given an occupational health consultation and offered counselling.

Those services are also available to frontline staff. Officers and staff who have to grade indecent images of children are seen annually by occupational health staff. However, at the time of inspection, the same support was not available for the team that investigates those people making and distributing the images. We were pleased that the force responded positively to this anomaly and began to review this immediately.

In addition, the force has encouraged the formation of a mental health peer support group that meets away from police premises. The force has also trained many officers and staff to be mental health ambassadors who can provide support and point their colleagues to other services.

## 4. Case file analysis

### Results of case file reviews

For our inspection, Gwent Police selected and self-assessed the effectiveness of its practice in 33 child protection cases. In accordance with HMICFRS criteria, the cases selected were a random sample from throughout Gwent. We asked the force to rate its handling of each of the self-assessed cases. Of these 33 cases, force assessors graded the practice in 27 as good, in 6 as requiring improvement and none as inadequate. We assessed the same cases. We graded the force's practice in 10 as good, in 17 as requiring improvement and in 6 as inadequate.

As part of the inspection, we also selected and examined a further 47 child protection cases. We assessed the force's practice in 10 as good, in 20 as requiring improvement and in 17 as inadequate. The files on each type of case had certain features in common.

#### Cases assessed by both Gwent Police and HMICFRS

Force assessment:

- 27 good
- 6 requires improvement
- 0 inadequate

HMICFRS assessment:

- 10 good
- 17 requires improvement
- 6 inadequate

#### Additional cases assessed only by HMICFRS

HMICFRS assessment:

- 10 good
- 20 requires improvement
- 17 inadequate

## **Breakdown of case file audit results by area of child protection**

### **Cases assessed involving enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989<sup>12</sup>**

Enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989:

- 4 good
- 4 requires improvement
- 2 inadequate

Common themes are that the files:

- include evidence of joint visits and initial action in cases;
- often include records of strategy discussions; and
- demonstrate good investigations when joint activity is agreed and cases are effectively supervised, but show that the standard of investigation is much lower when cases are given to officers who are not child protection specialists.

### **Cases assessed involving referrals relating to domestic abuse incidents or crimes**

Referrals relating to domestic abuse incidents or crimes:

- 5 good
- 4 requires improvement
- 3 inadequate

Common themes are that the force:

- assesses risk well at the beginning of a case;
- makes good investigation plans in respect of adult victims when a crime has clearly been committed; and
- provides good safeguarding advice to adult victims but often doesn't record the concerns and views of children, which can lead to a lack of understanding of how they are or have been affected.

---

<sup>12</sup> Local authorities, with the help of other organisations as appropriate, have a duty to make enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.

## **Cases assessed involving referrals arising from incidents other than domestic abuse**

Referrals arising from incidents other than domestic abuse:

- 2 good
- 6 requires improvement
- 2 inadequate

Common themes are that:

- the force responds well initially;
- when offences or safeguarding concerns are identified, this does not always result in an investigation; and
- officers often don't speak to children to understand their point of view, but outcomes for children are better when officers do speak to children and take account of all the circumstances.

## **Cases assessed involving children at risk from child sexual exploitation (CSE)**

Cases involving children at risk of CSE both online and offline:

- 3 good
- 4 requires improvement
- 9 inadequate

Common themes are that:

- activity to pursue those suspected of downloading and sharing indecent images of children is timely;
- there is some evidence of effective joint working but strategy meetings often take place too long after the initial concern is identified;
- the police can be reluctant to seize mobile devices that might contain evidence; and
- recording of joint protective planning is poor.



## **Cases assessed involving missing and absent children**

Children missing:

- 2 good
- 5 requires improvement
- 2 inadequate

Common themes are that:

- the force communications centre consistently uses THRIVE<sup>13</sup> and a structured question set to grade the urgency of response, but attending officers often do not refer to information held in the MIRAF<sup>14</sup> so do not fully understand the risks to the child; and
- prevention interviews<sup>15</sup> do not always take place or are not recorded but, when the risks are understood, activity to trace children can be comprehensive and effective.

## **Cases assessed involving children taken to a place of safety using or considering powers under section 46 of the Children Act 1989<sup>16</sup>**

Children taken to a place of safety by police officers using or considering powers under section 46 of the Children Act 1989:

- 3 good
- 3 requires improvement
- 0 inadequate

---

<sup>13</sup> The threat, harm, risk, investigation, vulnerability and engagement (THRIVE) model is used to assess the appropriate initial police response to a call for service. It allows a judgment to be made of the relative risk posed by the call and places the individual needs of the victim at the centre of that decision.

<sup>14</sup> Missing individual risk assessment form – a form used by the multi-agency missing team to record information about the risk to a child missing from home.

<sup>15</sup> The police have a responsibility to make sure that the returning person is safe and well. The purpose of the prevention interview is to identify any ongoing risk or factors that may contribute to the person going missing again.

<sup>16</sup> 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, to (a) remove the child to suitable accommodation and keep them there, or (b) take such steps as are reasonable to make sure that the child's removal from any hospital, or other place in which they are then being accommodated, is prevented. A child in these circumstances is referred to as 'having been taken into police protection'.

Common themes include that personnel:

- consider the circumstances of vulnerable children and make effective decisions to remove children with appropriate use of the power;
- liaise early enough and effectively with emergency children's social care services but often take children to police stations rather than more appropriate places;
- do not record decisions to use and end the power; and
- do not always record subsequent strategy discussion outcomes and joint plans.

### **Cases assessed involving sex offender management in which children have been assessed as at risk from the person being managed**

Sex offender management cases where children have been assessed as at risk from the person being managed:

- 1 good
- 5 requires improvement
- 3 inadequate

Common themes are that:

- breaches of notification requirements are often neither investigated nor recorded as crimes;
- when a breach is investigated, this is usually done by voluntary interview rather than arrest;
- when concerns for children are identified, the submission of a public protection notice<sup>17</sup> (PPN) is often seen as the only response required.

### **Cases assessed involving children detained in police custody**

Children in police custody:

- 0 good
- 6 requires improvement
- 2 inadequate

---

<sup>17</sup> A form used to record concerns for children and to share information with partner agencies.

Common themes are that:

- custody officers and staff do not have a good understanding of when alternative or secure accommodation is required;
- the police do not press hard enough to find a solution when local authority accommodation is not available;
- the attendance of appropriate adults at the custody office is timed to coincide with other events, such as interviews, rather than when the child is detained; and
- officers and staff often do not submit PPNs when children are arrested.

## 5. Initial contact

### **When members of the public contact the force, it assesses risk well and grades the response appropriately**

FPOC staff manage Gwent Police's response to reported incidents. It is a good example of how initial interaction with the public can be managed effectively, taking account of the presenting risk, threat and harm.

FPOC staff receive all calls for service made to the force. Call takers obtain as much information as they can regarding the incident itself and the parties involved.

We saw good evidence of risk assessment of calls using the THRIVE model. Call handlers use specific question sets and research to supplement their understanding of the risks. They consistently use this information to grade the response to calls.

We also saw evidence that call takers passed this information to attending officers. This means that officers are aware of issues relating to the address or family before they go to an incident. Officers told us that having this information was often very helpful.

For a call about a missing child, FPOC staff use the MIRAF. Here previous work conducted by the missing people team assists in determining risks to the missing child. This in turn influences the priority placed on the call.

For a high-priority incident involving a child, the matter is passed almost immediately to a despatcher to make sure that resources are deployed at once.

### **Non-urgent response has good governance**

If response is not needed immediately or urgently, then diary appointments can be made. A supervisor manages the diary so that inappropriate cases aren't diarised. We found that the appointments made were at a manageable level, avoiding unnecessary delay. And we were reassured that, unless it was explicit that there was no ongoing risk, cases involving children would not be placed in the diary.

### **There is an effective quality assessment framework to maintain and improve performance in first points of contact**

First-line supervisors dip sample two cases from each member of staff per month and second-line supervisors dip sample four cases per month. Themes for areas of improvement are identified and staff receive individual feedback for their personal development.

The quality assessment framework and dip sampling mean that supervisors can be assured that vulnerable people get the right response and safeguarding.

## **First point of contact staff receive comprehensive initial training and subsequent regular training**

FPOC staff undergo 18 months' minimum training before they are signed off as competent. The first phase is five weeks of classroom-based training. Recruits are introduced to police systems and receive training including safeguarding. Mentors are allocated to each probationary staff member for further practical training and guidance until they demonstrate competence.

Continuing professional development takes the form of five training days per year. It has recently included sessions on CSE and domestic abuse.

## **The force uses additional expertise to enhance the control room response**

Support workers from Women's Aid<sup>18</sup> work alongside FPOC staff. They offer advice to victims of domestic abuse and also give advice and guidance to officers attending incidents.

Mental health professionals work within the FPOC from 8.00am to 2.00am, providing access to mental health records of adults and children. They can support those calling when in crisis, and also give advice and support to officers. These are good initiatives that both FPOC and frontline staff now consider to be essential.

## **Frontline officers can recognise vulnerability and some signs of abuse**

We were pleased to see that the force recognises how important regular training is for officers and staff, and that this includes child protection issues. Internal communications by email, chief officers' blogs and screensaver reminders supplement the training. Frontline policing teams we spoke to were aware of child protection issues. Most of those we spoke to were confident in recognising vulnerability or signs of abuse in children, particularly children exposed to domestic abuse and neglect. Most were confident about recognising the signs of CSE and its links to children who go missing.

However, officers were less confident about recognising the signs of the criminal exploitation of children and were unsure about how they could report it.

---

<sup>18</sup> Women's Aid is a charity that provides support services and advice to women and children who are affected by domestic abuse.

## **We saw some good examples of officers responding quickly to clear and specific concerns about children**

When the concern is clear and specific, officers often attend promptly. They are effective in carrying out preliminary tasks, such as ensuring the immediate safety of children and assessing how best to proceed. We also found officers were good at making initial enquiries and using their powers to arrest or protect when necessary.

The father of a seven-year-old girl contacted the police expressing concern that his daughter was at home with her mother who was very drunk. Officers attended promptly but got no response at the address. They made enquiries with family members and neighbours who confirmed that the mother was inside the home.

Officers gained entry and found the child inside in complete darkness. The mother was drunk and asleep. She was arrested. Officers spoke with the child and she said she was happy to go and stay with her father.

An immediate strategy discussion was held with a social worker. It was jointly agreed that the child should stay with her father.

## **Officers often do not speak to children or record their behaviour and demeanour**

In the cases we reviewed, we often found that the police had not spoken to children consistently and had neither recorded their concerns nor their behaviour and demeanour.

How a child behaves provides important information about how an incident has affected them. This is especially true when the child is too young to speak to officers, or where there may be a risk if this happens with a parent present. The police should watch how the child behaves. This will help them assess the child's needs. It will also help them decide if the child should be referred to social care services.

All frontline officers have body-worn video cameras and understand the benefits of this technology when seeking to capture evidence, specifically about domestic abuse incidents. However, the use of the cameras is inconsistent. The force knows this and is working to make improvements through internal communications.

An 18-year-old man called the police because his mother was being viciously attacked by her partner. He had stamped on her and grabbed her around the throat. Officers attended promptly and arrested the offender. However, the woman's other three children – aged one, five and nine – had witnessed the assault.

There was no record of what, if any, protective planning had been completed for the children. Nor any evidence that they had been spoken to, or efforts made to understand how they had been affected. Officers did not note the living conditions. They did complete a public protection notice (PPN), but this contained insufficient information.

There was no record of whether the PPN was sent to children's social care, or what action was taken to protect the children in the longer term.

### **Recommendation**

- We recommend that Gwent Police acts within three months to make sure that children's concerns and views are obtained and recorded (including noting their behaviour and demeanour), to help influence decisions made about them.

## 6. Assessment and help

### **The process for sharing information with children's social care is weak, resulting in missed opportunities to intervene**

When an officer has a concern for a child, they submit a PPN. They email it directly to children's social care services in the relevant local authority area. We found the quality of these forms was mixed. Information was often missing and the views of the child were not recorded. Information about the history of the family or individuals concerned, such as previous convictions, was usually not added.

Children's social care services make an assessment based on the content of the PPN. Decisions about intervention are therefore often based on incomplete information.

The force's own research shows that around 80 percent of the submitted forms result in no further action being taken by the local authority. The five local authorities do not routinely report the decision they have made to the force. There is, as a result, no opportunity to provide further information or challenge the decision. Consequently, opportunities to intervene are being missed.

In addition, officers often do not document whether consent has been given to pass information on to other services. This restricts the local authority's ability to provide early help through its [Families First](#) programme.

### **Senior leaders cannot be assured that decisions made at strategy discussions meet their expectations**

If children's social care services believe a strategy discussion is required, they contact the force's central referral unit (CRU). A strategy discussion is held over the phone in most cases.

The All Wales Child Protection Procedures advise that those attending strategy discussions should have sufficient seniority to make decisions for their organisation. CRU police constables usually contribute on behalf of Gwent Police. Although experienced in the role, they are not child protection investigators. They are expected to make decisions about whether joint investigations are required in complex child abuse cases.

A sergeant reviews any decision that there should be a single agency response, for example when a criminal investigation would not be in the best interest of the child. At the time of inspection, over 700 such decisions were awaiting review. This means that decisions are not reviewed until long after they are made.



## **There is aspiration to review this model**

Along with the local authority in Newport, the force has created a safeguarding hub. A detective sergeant works alongside social care and is available to contribute to strategy discussions. However, the process used to share information is the same, with the same weaknesses.

At the time of inspection, senior leaders were talking to the other organisations involved about better ways of working. The Early Action Together programme wants to introduce early and effective assessment of cases (known as ‘triage’) involving all agencies in both Newport and Blaenau Gwent. This is encouraging.

Senior officers know that getting the support of all those involved to make improvements will not be easy and will take time.

## **We found that good contributions are made to long-term multi-agency safeguarding plans**

Gwent Police employs dedicated staff to research for and attend child protection conferences.<sup>19</sup> They attend over 90 percent of initial child protection conferences to discuss and agree long-term safeguarding plans. They supply reports when they are unable to attend. When a child is made the subject of a protection plan, this is flagged on Niche,<sup>20</sup> so staff know about risks to the child when they attend incidents. However, those attending conferences rarely discuss the case with the investigating officer, so opportunities to better understand complex investigations may be missed.

## **Review of domestic abuse incidents by specialists improves the service to victims but misses the opportunity to consider the risk to children**

The domestic abuse safeguarding team reviews incidents of domestic abuse daily. They assess the grading applied under the DASH<sup>21</sup> risk assessment and refer high-risk cases to MARAC.<sup>22</sup> Staff in the team can recommend an increase in the grading when they identify elevated risk due to repeat incidents. This can mean that a case is referred to MARAC when it would not otherwise have been.

---

<sup>19</sup> A child protection conference brings together family members, the child (where appropriate), and those professionals most involved with the child and the family to make decisions about the child's future safety, health and development.

<sup>20</sup> Niche is a single police information management system.

<sup>21</sup> DASH is a checklist to help professionals identify the level of risk a victim of domestic abuse, stalking, harassment and ‘honour-based’ violence faces.

<sup>22</sup> A MARAC is a locally held meeting of statutory and voluntary agency representatives to share information about high-risk victims of domestic abuse, at which 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's or child's safety.

MARAC meetings are held every two weeks in each of the two policing areas. A detective inspector or children's social care manager chairs the meetings.

Victims of domestic abuse receive a good service with the right support available to them. However, we did not see that the cumulative risk of repeated incidents was recognised as increased risk to children.

PPNs were not routinely submitted to highlight to social care services that children in those families were likely to be at more risk of harm. Therefore, sharing information with children's social care can be missed or unnecessarily delayed.

## **The force shares information with partners agencies which means that children experiencing domestic abuse are given better support**

The force shares information with the health visiting service when a child of preschool age is exposed to domestic abuse.

For children of school age, the force has introduced Operation Encompass<sup>23</sup> in Newport, which has improved information sharing with schools. This approach allows other organisations involved to take part in developing protective plans and providing support.

The force told us they planned to extend Operation Encompass throughout the force area in March this year. This is a positive step and means that all school children in Gwent will receive the same offer of support when experiencing domestic abuse in their homes.

## **The force benefits from the presence of a multi-agency missing people team**

There has been a multi-agency missing people team covering the whole of Gwent for several years. This team reviews every missing incident involving a child and speaks daily with the Quartz team to discuss any potential links to CSE. When a child has been reported missing, the team completes or updates a MIRAF. This contains comprehensive background information about those who pose a risk to the child, where they have been found previously and details of any Child Abduction Warning

---

<sup>23</sup> Operation Encompass is a scheme in which the force, when it has been called to an incident of domestic abuse at a child's home, informs a 'key adult' at the relevant local school before 9.00am the next morning (or before 9.00am on the Monday morning if an incident occurs over a weekend). This enables schools to provide support to the child(ren) involved, and to offer practical help and information.

Notice<sup>24</sup> served. The form also gives the recommended grading of risk should the child be reported missing in the future.

Llamau, a charity, is responsible for talking to children, when they return home, about what has happened to them. Llamau adds any important information from these meetings to the MIRAF. Interviews with children at this stage can provide a wealth of information about why they are running away, particularly when this is becoming more frequent and the child is reluctant to speak to police or other agencies. A better understanding of why a child has run away can give partner agencies vital information and support more effective risk management. It should also inform planning and decision making about future safeguarding action.

The team also notifies schools daily when one of their pupils has been missing. This is another good example of recognising how wider partnerships help to keep children safe.

## **However, those responsible for grading risk and making enquiries often do not refer to the missing individual risk assessment form**

When a missing child is reported to the police control room, staff use information from the MIRAF to decide the nature of the response required – this might be immediate or (where the risk is lower) take place more slowly. Once this is done, the control room allocates the matter to a response officer to investigate the circumstances of the disappearance and locate the child. The response officer is responsible for assessing the risks faced by a child as the investigation progresses. However, MIRAFs are stored on a separate database to the main IT system, Niche. Information is not replicated or summarised on the Niche database. Many officers we spoke to were unaware that MIRAFs existed. Others did not know how to access them. Their decisions about risk are therefore not based on all the relevant information and, as a result, may not be accurate or appropriate. Nor is the information contained on MIRAFs used to develop trigger plans,<sup>25</sup> and so opportunities to locate children more quickly may be missed.

---

<sup>24</sup> A non-statutory notice issued when the police become aware of a child spending time with an adult whom they believe could be harmful to them. A notice is used to disrupt the adult's association with the child, as well as warning the adult that the association could result in arrest and prosecution.

<sup>25</sup> A trigger plan is a plan to locate a child quickly when they go missing.

## **There is good activity to locate missing children when the risk is recognised**

When greater risk is recognised, there are examples of timely and effective work to trace children reported missing. This highlights the positive outcomes that can be achieved.

We saw cases of very good activity to locate missing children. It is encouraging that missing children are discussed at daily force and management meetings. One meeting that we observed instigated significant activity across the force to find a missing child.

Care home staff reported that a 15-year-old boy was missing. He had been missing previously and patrols attended promptly. Officers conducted many enquiries to trace the boy and there was evidence of good supervision.

Additional oversight of the case came from the daily management meeting. Discussion took place with children's social care while the boy was missing to plan his longer-term safety and to decide whether his placement was suitable.

## **Risk grading of missing children is often incorrect, which results in a poor response**

The force has already identified that the 'medium' risk category is often used incorrectly. As a result, activity to trace children may not be enough. This is also something we have seen in the case audits.

A care home reported that a 17-year-old girl they looked after was missing. Police information showed that she had been missing numerous times before. She was a victim of child sexual exploitation (CSE), was thought to be a facilitator of CSE and had a history of self-harming, drug misuse and alcohol misuse. She was also reported to be pregnant and was a child whose case was being managed by the Quartz team.

Despite the risk to her being high, the attending officer graded it as medium. An inspector later reviewed the grading and kept it at medium. It took six hours for a patrol to attend the home and begin making enquiries. It was 24 hours before officers made enquiries at addresses she was known to visit.

It is known that she spent time with two individuals who potentially posed a risk to her but there was no record that any steps had been taken to prevent her visiting them in the future.

## **Opportunities to understand why children have gone missing and the risk they have been exposed to are being missed**

A prevention interview is not conducted on all occasions when a child is found or returns home. When interviews do take place, little information is recorded.

Interviews with children at this stage can help to explain why they are running away, particularly when this is more frequent. This can help to develop more effective risk management plans. Without this information, officers may not fully understand the potential link between children going missing and their being exploited or exposed to other risks.

The force is reviewing its missing people policy, recognising that it predates the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice.

### **Recommendations**

- We recommend that Gwent Police immediately undertakes a review, together with children's social care services and other relevant agencies, to ensure that the force is fulfilling its statutory responsibilities as set out in the All Wales Child Protection Procedures in respect of the assessment of risk, how information is recorded and shared, and the development of joint protective plans.
- We recommend that, within three months, Gwent Police improves practice in cases of children who go missing from home. As a minimum, this should include a review of how information is recorded, and making staff more aware of:
  - their responsibilities for protecting children who are reported missing from home, especially when this happens regularly;
  - the importance of investigating where a child has been, and who with; and
  - their responsibilities for conducting and recording prevention interviews when children return home.
- We recommend that, within three months, Gwent Police reviews its processes and practices to make sure that its staff can draw together all available information from police systems in order to better inform their responses and risk assessments.

## 7. Investigation

### **We found some good examples of investigating officers using an appropriate mix of investigative and protective approaches**

This combined approach is necessary to make sure that the force keeps the safeguarding of children at the heart of its efforts, while also pursuing opportunities to investigate crime.

We saw good examples of investigative activity, particularly when serious offences were reported. These have included prompt action to arrest suspects and use bail conditions to manage the risk they pose to others. We have also seen good child-centred rationale for decisions made.

The better cases had meaningful supervision, with actions clearly recorded on Niche.

A 13-year-old girl reported to her teacher that she had been assaulted by her stepfather. She said that her younger siblings – aged seven, five and three – had also been assaulted by their mother and stepfather. The teacher reported this to children's social care services and they promptly contacted the police to hold a strategy discussion.

It was agreed that a joint investigation should take place. All the children were spoken to using specialist intermediaries. This allowed all services to understand their experiences and needs. The children were placed with foster carers by the local authority. Specialist officers conducted a good investigation that was well supervised.

### **However, investigations are poorer when they are allocated to non-specialist officers**

We found that the standard of joint working was much lower when child protection cases were allocated to officers not working within PPU's. There was little evidence of contact with children's social care. In addition, the supervision of cases was not as evident, with less meaningful intervention from first- and second-line managers.

These cases often involve child offenders perpetrating sexual offences against child victims. We saw that, in these circumstances, officers did not consider safeguarding for the perpetrator, the cause of his behaviour or the risk he posed to others.

## Investigations are delayed unnecessarily for several reasons

We found that in some cases there were delays in the assessment process and during investigations. High workloads and staff vacancies in specialist departments caused some of these delays.

Particularly in CSE cases, there were delays in the assessment process. There are two ways to instigate assessment of risk. First, officers can recognise signs of CSE when dealing with a child and submit a PPN. Second, the missing team can identify the risk of CSE through missing episodes and complete a multi-agency sexual exploitation risk assessment framework (SERAF).<sup>26</sup> If the score is over 16, the relevant local authority reassesses the SERAF. If they agree with the grading, they will request a strategy meeting.

We saw delays of up to two weeks in holding a strategy meeting. This means that the risk could have escalated significantly before a meaningful response involving all the relevant agencies could be agreed. This in turn could lead to further delays in investigation.

We saw delays in examining media devices. Low-risk cases were currently taking about eight weeks longer than they should. This was because of sickness absence. It did not affect high-risk cases.

The reasons for delay in some investigations are often not recorded in investigation logs. The force will therefore struggle to understand the situation and how to improve it.

A 16-year-old girl went missing from her care home. On her return, she reported to her carers that, while she had been missing, she was with female friends aged 17 and 18. They had been to the address of adult males and engaged in drug taking and sexual activity.

A strategy discussion did not take place until two weeks after the disclosure because the child's social worker was not available. During the strategy discussion, it was agreed that a joint investigation should take place. The girls were interviewed, and some enquiries were made to trace CCTV, but the men involved were not arrested until five months later.

The crimes disclosed were not recorded and the case was not properly supervised. Flags were not placed on police systems highlighting the risk to the 16-year-old girl until six weeks after the report.

---

<sup>26</sup> The SERAF enables safeguarding actions to be linked to evidence of risk, thereby facilitating both preventive action and appropriate interventions. It is intended to inform appropriate responses in relation to children and young people's safeguarding needs.

## **Some delays are because of issues that the force cannot easily influence**

The force makes good use of intermediaries – specially trained individuals – to help vulnerable victims and witnesses to give complete, coherent and accurate evidence. This is particularly useful in helping the police to communicate effectively with child victims. Before interviewing any child, personnel should consider using an intermediary to support and help the child to give the best possible evidence and ensure that the child's views are heard. In some cases examined, we found delays in obtaining the services of an intermediary. This is a national problem, and one that we have found in previous inspections.

Some delays are because of family court proceedings taking place in parallel to the criminal investigation. In these circumstances, prosecutors may wait until evidence gathered through that process is collected before making decisions about criminal prosecution.

The force understands the importance of supporting and updating children in these circumstances.

## **Recording practices are poor, resulting in a lack of co-ordination and limited supervision of some cases**

We saw several cases in which investigative activity and protective planning had not been recorded. This means that supervisors cannot oversee investigations as they should in all cases.

Niche is designed to be a single system for recording investigative activity, intelligence, missing people enquiries and the detention of individuals. However, the force uses separate standalone systems, with restricted access, to record important information. This includes:

- comprehensive information about missing children held within the MIRAF database;
- information and joint planning discussed at multi-agency child exploitation (MACE) meetings;
- joint planning discussed at MARAC meetings;
- joint planning relating to those children at risk of exploitation through serious and organised crime; and
- intelligence research relating to those making and distributing indecent images of children.



Because these systems do not interact with each other, it means that links between risky locations, those who pose a risk to children and children at most risk may not be recognised. This means that officers deal with incidents when they do not know all the information that the force holds on a child. The consequence of this is that decisions may be flawed and result in the development of less effective protective plans.

It also means that the force is unable to make best use of the various multi-agency meetings to co-ordinate joint activity to mitigate risk to children.

## **Multi-agency child exploitation meetings provide the force with an opportunity to improve the co-ordination of response to child sexual exploitation**

The force has been instrumental in introducing MACE meetings in each of the five local authority areas. These allow professionals working with children at risk of CSE to co-ordinate their activity.

A risk assessment process identifies those children at most risk. Each child identified as at risk is added to the agenda for discussion. They should also be flagged on Niche. We saw useful discussion and agreed action in some cases. But meaningful co-ordination was problematic in numerous cases, in part because of the way information was recorded.

The numbers of children to be discussed in each meeting at Newport created a problem. Each meeting was allocated an hour. At the Monmouthshire meeting, when 11 children were believed to be at risk, this was enough time. In the Newport meeting, there were over 40 children believed to be at risk. Only those believed to be at the highest risk were dealt with. Most children were not discussed.

Children in Newport are at greater risk because important partnership information may not be shared and important safeguarding activity not agreed on.

## **Analysis is not routinely undertaken to understand current risk to children**

The multiple ways that information is stored create problems in analysing intelligence held by the force. Quartz teams do not receive regular analytical products to assist with targeting perpetrators or hotspots. There is also limited tasking to neighbourhood teams to support intelligence capture, or to target perpetrators and hotspots.

We were encouraged to learn that the force recognises this problem. It is beginning to consider how best to capture intelligence from its own systems and those of

partner organisations. This will help the force to better understand the current risks to the children of Gwent.

## **Investigation into online child sexual exploitation is usually good**

The force has a paedophile and online investigation team (POLIT), which investigates the sharing and distribution of indecent images of children online. This team also deals with referrals from the National Crime Agency's child exploitation and online protection command (CEOP).

The force carries out a risk assessment when CEOP refers a case. Using police information and that of partner agencies, the force establishes whether the suspect lives or works with children.

When there is a concern about a suspect living with a child, the force refers the case to social care colleagues at once. High-risk cases are dealt with immediately, usually resulting in action on the same day and we saw no delay in dealing with medium and lower-risk cases.

However, the force records intelligence about the development of CEOP packages on a standalone system, not Niche. This makes it harder for managers to monitor progress of investigations.

The POLIT team uses a digital forensic expert to help with the examining of digital electronic devices. This allows the team to make an early assessment of devices at the scene before seizure and to use expertise to find hidden devices, which is good practice.

## **Frontline officers are sometimes reluctant to seize devices, thereby missing investigative opportunities**

We saw cases when the police had responded to reports of children who had been targeted by individuals inciting them to share indecent images of themselves. Officers took steps to safeguard and advise those children identified in the initial report. However, when it became clear that other children had been approached by the same individuals, enquiries to be sure that those children were safe were sometimes lacking.

In addition, officers are reluctant to seize mobile devices belonging to victims. Examining these devices could yield evidence that identifies offenders but it is often not done.

A father reported that unknown men had groomed his 11-year-old daughter. She had sent indecent images of herself to them using social media. One of the males sent an image of his penis to her. When she blocked the men from being able to contact her, one of them sent the images of the 11-year-old girl to her 10-year-old friend. He threatened to distribute them further if the 11-year-old girl did not establish contact with him.

Officers did not seize or examine the devices belonging to the two children. This means that the images may still have existed on their devices, making them vulnerable to further exploitation.

Although the 11-year-old was already being supported through a child protection plan, there was no evidence of a strategy discussion in relation to this matter. The assessment of this incident as part of the longer-term strategy to safeguard this child is not documented.

## **Recommendations**

- We recommend that, within three months, Gwent Police should improve its child protection and exploitation investigations, paying particular attention to:
  - improving staff awareness, knowledge and skills in this area of work;
  - working with its partner agencies to ensure a prompt response to any concern raised;
  - improving how information is recorded so it is accessible;
  - improving the oversight and management of cases; and
  - working with partners to make the best use of multi-agency meetings.

## 8. Decision-making

### **The use of police protection powers was appropriate in all the cases we audited, but children are often taken to police stations when the power is used**

We found that the police response is generally appropriate when the force clearly defines a case as a child protection matter from the outset. We saw examples of officers and staff making effective decisions to protect children. When there were significant concerns about the safety of children, such as parents assaulting their children, or being drunk while looking after them, officers handled incidents well. They used their powers appropriately to remove children from harm's way. It is a very serious step to remove a child from a family by way of police protection. In the cases examined, decisions to take a child to a place of safety were well considered and made in the best interests of the child.

A mother reported that her seven-year-old son had gone missing while he had gone with her to a public house. The call taker correctly graded the response as an emergency and this resulted in good co-ordinated activity to look for the child, which was well supervised.

The child was quickly located and taken home. Officers decided that living conditions at the address were not habitable. They correctly used their protective powers to safeguard the child and arrested the mother.

Discussion took place with children's social care and a suitable placement was found for the child.

However, we found that, when the power was used, children were often taken to a police station. This should happen only in exceptional circumstances, such as a lack of immediately available local authority accommodation.

### **Record keeping after using police protection powers was often poor**

We found some examples where the police had carried out investigations promptly and effectively. However, personnel do not always record on police systems details about safeguarding and joint work with other organisations, or the fact that a

discussion has taken place. Designated officers<sup>27</sup> often don't record when and in what circumstances the power ended, or details of the long-term protective plan.

A family friend reported that a seven-year-old girl was at risk of neglect because her mother was too drunk to pick her up from school. She said that the child had also disclosed that her mother had assaulted her in the past.

The police did not attend the address until the next day, meaning that the child was potentially exposed to further unnecessary risk. When the police did attend, the officer correctly used their protective powers but took the child to a police station.

The child was safeguarded following a strategy discussion. However, there were no records of the designated officer's details, or of management of the power, or when and in what circumstances it ended.

## Recommendations

- We recommend that, within three months, Gwent Police works with its partner agencies to ensure that children are taken to appropriate places of safety when this power is used. All relevant information is to be recorded properly and made readily accessible in all cases where there are concerns about the welfare of children. Guidance to staff should include:
  - what information they should record (and in what form) on their systems to enable good decision making; and
  - an emphasis on the importance of ensuring that records are made promptly and kept up to date.

---

<sup>27</sup> The designated officer is responsible for enquiring into cases in which the police take children into their protection. Their duties include regularly reviewing the grounds for police protection to determine whether the power should remain in force.

## 9. Trusted adult

It is important that children can trust the police. We found that in some (although not all) child protection cases, officers consider carefully how best to approach a child and/or the parents or carers and explore the most effective ways in which to communicate with them. Such sensitivity builds confidence and creates stronger relationships between the police and the child and/or the parents or carers. We found that the force works well with external organisations, family members and other people to protect children when they need immediate safeguarding. In the cases where this happens, the force's carefully considered and sensitive approach enables vulnerable children to be kept safe.

The ambulance service reported to the police that they had received a call about a 14-year-old girl self-harming in a supermarket. Officers were deployed promptly and found the girl.

The mental health worker employed in the force communications centre gave advice to the officers. They took time to speak to the girl and understand her concerns. She had superficial cuts to her arms and was not seriously injured. She said she wanted to see her support worker, so officers contacted her mother and asked her to attend.

The officers stayed with the child, offering her support and reassurance until her mother arrived to take her home. The ambulance service was updated, and arrangements made for their staff to visit the child at home rather than at the very public supermarket.

### **The force is engaging well with children in the community**

The force, along with its partner agencies, is trying to improve and develop the way it works with children. In Newport, a chief inspector has responsibility for co-ordinating the force's activity in preventing children being criminally exploited by those involved in organised crime.

Through joint working between other interested organisations and the nine secondary schools in the city, ten children have been identified as most vulnerable. The St Giles Trust<sup>28</sup> is working with these children to try to divert them from criminality.

In addition, presentations about children protecting themselves from exploitation are given to pupils in local schools. Headteachers have been given information about

---

<sup>28</sup> A charity that aims to provide interventions and support for young people, their families and communities affected by gangs and serious violence through [SOS Newport](#).

how to spot the signs of potential exploitation and are able to draw on expertise from Barnardo's should they be concerned about children in their schools.

Through the Early Action Together programme, the force is telling staff about the impact of adverse childhood experiences. At the time of inspection, 556 officers, 91 police staff and 144 staff from partner agencies had received this input. All will have received it by July 2019.

The force is working with younger children through its 'Mini Police' scheme, a project where 9–11-year-olds carry out police-supervised tasks in their communities. Through this scheme, children in 24 primary schools receive citizenship education inputs, are involved in community initiatives and reward activities through collaboration with local sports teams.

The force has a well-established cadet scheme for 13–18-year-olds, in each of the five local authority areas. There are 20–25 cadets in each area. There have been efforts to recruit from less affluent groups and to include children with vulnerabilities.

The force is encouraging the cadets to be active citizens in their area by being involved in crime prevention initiatives and supporting community-based projects – for example, Ffrind i mi (Friend in me), which aims to help lonely or isolated people reconnect with their community.

## 10. Managing those posing a risk to children

### **Staffing levels are good in the team dedicated to managing those posing a risk to children**

Gwent Police has a team, MOSOVO (management of sex offenders and violent offenders), that is dedicated to multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA).<sup>29</sup>

At the time of inspection, there were 776 registered sex offenders (RSOs) being managed in the community in Gwent. Of these, 95 were graded as high risk and one as very high risk.

There was a ratio of about 53 RSOs to one manager, which is only slightly higher than what is considered reasonable (approximately 50:1).

In January 2017, the National Police Chiefs' Council issued guidance that forces may use either active or reactive management approaches with RSOs. Active management requires visiting the offender. Officers receive training in the use of the active risk management system (ARMS). National practice is for police ARMS assessments to be completed at least every 12 months, or when something happens that may result in a major change to the current overall assessment and risk management plan for the offender.

### **The force is using reactive management of offenders to allow them to focus on higher-risk offenders**

The force may move individuals from active to reactive management. This can be done if an ARMS assessment suggests that an RSO presents a low level of risk. The offender manager must also be satisfied that the offender has not committed offences or presented any risk for a three-year period. At the time of our inspection, 86 percent of offenders had received an ARMS assessment as required. As a result, the force had begun to move some RSOs to reactive management, although they were unable to say how many.

The use of both active and reactive management, effectively carried out, should allow the force to focus on those RSOs posing the greatest risk. It may also ease demand to a limited extent by allowing reactive management for those RSOs who fit the criteria.

---

<sup>29</sup> MAPPA are in place to ensure the successful management of violent and sexual offenders. Agencies involved as responsible bodies include the police, probation trusts and the prison service. Other organisations may become involved: for example, the Youth Justice Board is responsible for the care of young offenders.



## **Frontline officers are informed about registered sex offenders in the areas they patrol**

As the numbers of registered offenders increase, collecting and sharing intelligence about them, and managing them appropriately, become increasingly demanding. It is positive that the force recognises this and makes information about RSOs available to frontline and neighbourhood teams.

The force flags RSOs on its police records management system (Niche) and the command and control system (STORM) used to manage incidents. This means that officers going to apparently unrelated incidents at the addresses of RSOs know that they are visiting already known offenders. As a result, they have the information they need to make good decisions.

There are also good links between the MOSOVO team and frontline teams. Information about registered offenders is shared through briefing and tasking frontline officers.

## **Opportunities to mitigate the risk posed by registered sex offenders are being missed because their failure to notify changes is often not recorded or investigated**

Registered offenders must notify the police in person at a prescribed police station in the area where they plan to live. We saw some cases where registered offenders failed to notify a change of circumstances or register an address within three days, as the law demands. We found that their manager would phone them to remind them, then visit them at home and deal with the notification. This does not comply with the law. The failure to notify was often not recorded as a crime and did not result in an interview or further investigation.

Offences are not investigated or recorded as a result. Offenders' behaviour will not be fully understood locally or if they move to another area. Nor will it be known to sentencing courts when future offences are committed.

When a breach was treated as a crime, we found the offender was often invited to the police station on a voluntary basis to be dealt with. This approach misses the opportunity to arrest and properly use search powers, or to use bail conditions to better manage the risk they pose.

## Opportunities to work more collaboratively with partner agencies to protect children are being missed

When there is a concern about an RSO having access to children, managers submit a PPN, sometimes several days later. Managers often do not discuss the matter with a social worker or take opportunities to jointly visit perpetrators and families. This can leave children exposed to unnecessary risk.

Police were called to a report of a domestic incident in the early hours of a Sunday morning. The male at the address was a registered sex offender (RSO). He was not at his registered address. He had been in a relationship with the woman living at the address for several months. He had not told police that he was at this address, but the offence was not recognised and he was not arrested.

His sexual harm prevention order (SHPO) prevented him being in the presence of children without express permission of children's social care. Children aged two and five were living at the address, although they were not there when police attended. No further enquiries were made about this at the time.

The MOSOVO team took no further action until the following Wednesday. They conducted an unannounced visit to the address. The RSO and one of the children were there. They did not arrest the offender for breaching his SHPO. They asked him to leave the house and interviewed him by appointment two days later. He admitted the offences and was summonsed to court.

In a subsequent unannounced visit, they again found him at the address. He admitted opening a new bank account, which he had not told his manager about, but this further breach of notification was not investigated or pursued.

His risk assessment was not reviewed until three months after the original incident and did not contain all the relevant information.

### Recommendations

- We recommend that, within three months, Gwent Police acts to improve its management of RSOs, paying particular attention to:
  - how it deals with those offenders who do not comply with notification requirements; and
  - how it engages with partner agencies to protect children at risk from managed offenders.

## 11. Police detention

### **We are concerned about the detention of children in police custody**

The force has two custody facilities, at Newport and Ystrad Mynach. Neither has a separate custody area for children or other vulnerable people. The force has set aside a room to receive vulnerable prisoners for processing in Newport but not at Ystrad Mynach. We saw through our audits that children were usually held in cells in the same areas as adult detainees, rather than in detention rooms.

Custody records often lack detail or a rationale for decisions made. We also saw entries within custody records that suggested a child had been removed from a cell, possibly for interview, but the reason was not recorded.

Case audits have shown that arrests are usually appropriate and necessary. There is evidence that custody officers do challenge some arrests of children. However, some children are arrested when this is not absolutely necessary, for example for breaching court bail conditions, such as a curfew, in the early evening. There is then no alternative but to detain these children overnight. Such arrests could usually be made during the day, when a court is sitting, to prevent unnecessarily detaining children.

### **We found delays in appropriate adults attending to support children in custody**

We found that children detained in Gwent did not consistently receive early support from appropriate adults. Guidance under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 states that, once an appropriate adult is identified, that person should be asked to come to the custody centre as soon as practicable. In some of the cases we examined, there was evidence of long delays before appropriate adults arrived. They generally arrived for the time the child was being interviewed, rather than providing early support of their overall welfare needs, rights and entitlements. This could lead to significant delays – often more than ten hours – in a child seeing someone other than the police.

## **Detained children with complex needs are often not referred to children's social care**

Many children brought into police custody have complex needs. They are likely to be vulnerable and in need of support to keep them safe. In many cases, a referral to children's social care services is needed. However, in our review of case files, we found the submissions of referral forms for children in custody to be inconsistent in number and quality.

All children entering custody in Gwent should see a healthcare professional (HCP) who will assess their fitness to be detained and complete a youth assessment form. This includes a questionnaire that asks details of family relationships, school attendance, and whether they self-harm or have been a victim of sexual or physical abuse.

We saw some cases when an HCP assessment had not been completed, or was significantly delayed, after a child had entered custody. This means that risks to children may not be acted on. Completed forms are stored in a file in the custody suite. They are not uploaded to the child's custody record and therefore the information is not readily available to assist with future risk assessments.

We examined a sample of these forms and identified some cases when no referral was made to children's services although safeguarding issues were evident.

We are reassured that the force has acted quickly to remedy this, and has already instigated plans to train HCPs and agency staff around the use of PPNs.

## **Custody officers and staff do not have a good understanding of when alternative or secure accommodation is needed**

The local authority is responsible for providing somewhere suitable to stay (alternative accommodation) for children charged with offences and denied bail. Only in exceptional circumstances (such as during extreme weather) would the transfer of the child to such accommodation not be in the child's best interests. In rare cases – for example, if a child presented a high risk of serious harm to others – secure accommodation might be necessary.

We found that there was confusion about when this legislation applied. For example, alternative accommodation was sought in cases where court bail had been breached. In these circumstances, the child must be held at the police station until they next appear in court. In cases where bail was refused after a child was charged, secure accommodation was sought when alternative accommodation should have been requested.

## **When local authority accommodation is not available, custody officers do not ask their managers for help to find a solution**

Custody officers do not ask senior officers to intervene when the local authority fails to find appropriate alternative accommodation. The force also does not raise these cases at the time with senior leaders within the local authority. This means that children are being detained unnecessarily for long periods.

A 15-year-old boy was arrested for robbery. An appropriate adult was contacted and agreed to attend the police station, but this was arranged for seven hours later. The appropriate adult was not asked to attend when the boy was strip-searched. The search was not urgent and therefore this situation did not comply with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Although a risk assessment was carried out and a care plan documented at the time of detention, no youth assessment was carried out by a healthcare professional at any point during the boy's detention. He was detained in a cell rather than a detention room.

He was later charged with offences. Bail was refused. Alternative accommodation was not considered. The custody sergeant asked the local authority for secure accommodation but this could not be found. The boy was detained for 53 hours until his appearance at court.

A public protection notice to alert children's social care to his criminality and vulnerability was not submitted.

Police received a report from a tagging monitoring company that a 12-year-old boy on court-imposed bail conditions had breached his curfew. This had been happening for some time and he had received written warnings.

Officers decided to arrest the child in the early evening, so he had to be detained overnight in a police station.

In these circumstances, the requirements under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and obligation on the local authority to provide alternative accommodation do not apply. The custody sergeant who sought secure accommodation did not understand this.

## Recommendations

- We recommend that, immediately, Gwent Police should undertake a review (jointly with children's social care services and other relevant organisations) of how it manages the detention of children. This review should include, as a minimum, how best to:
  - make sure that children are detained only when necessary, and for the absolute minimum amount of time;
  - make sure that appropriate adults attend the police station promptly;
  - make sure that officers consider the needs of the child and make referrals to children's social care when necessary;
  - make sure that custody officers know the circumstances in which alternative or secure accommodation are required;
  - assess, at an early stage, the need for alternative accommodation (secure or otherwise) and work with children's social care services to achieve the best option for the child; and
  - when alternative accommodation cannot be found, escalate the issue to seek a resolution.

## Conclusion

### **The overall effectiveness of the force and its response to children who need help and protection**

Senior leaders in Gwent Police show a clear commitment to making sure that child protection and safeguarding the vulnerable are priorities. We found that the force was committed to improving its services for children.

The force has put a lot of time and effort into understanding the demands on the PPU and to increasing capacity for that demand.

We found many good examples of Gwent Police engaging with children and young people, such as through diversion away from organised crime, the police cadet programme and the Mini Police scheme. However, we found that further work was required to make sure that the decisions made about and for children took account of their views and considered carefully the impact on them.

It is important that senior leaders can test the nature and quality of decision making and its effects on children. Current processes for assessing performance do not emphasise this enough. A framework that focuses on the outcomes for children who need protection would help the force to improve its understanding of results and make sure that service provision is in line with leaders' expectations.

The force engages positively with local authorities in the area. However, we found several areas of practice that needed more work to make sure that the best outcomes for children were central to that joint working.

Senior leaders know that there are inconsistencies and areas for improvement in the service provided to children. We welcome the response of the force, its engagement with us, and its willingness to act quickly to address areas of concern identified through the child protection case audits carried out during this inspection.

As we highlighted earlier, we found some examples of good work by individual frontline officers responding to incidents of concern involving children. However, in our review of cases, we found that there were inconsistencies and areas for improvement that the force needed to address to make sure that all children were kept safe.

Our recommendations aim to help the force make improvements in these areas.

## **Next steps**

Within six weeks of the publication of this report, HMICFRS requires an update of the action the force has taken to respond to those recommendations where we have asked for immediate action.

Gwent Police should also provide an action plan, within six weeks of the publication of this report, specifying how it intends to respond to our other recommendations.

Subject to the update and action plan received, we will revisit Gwent Police no later than six months after the publication of this report to assess how it is managing the implementation of all 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 organisations are set out in the statutory guidance All Wales Child Protection Procedures. 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 focus on the experience of, and outcomes for, children following their journey through the child protection and criminal investigation processes. They assess how well the police service has helped and protected children and investigated alleged criminal acts, taking account of, but not measuring compliance with, policies and guidance.

The inspections consider how the arrangements for protecting children, and the leadership and management of the police service, contribute to and support effective practice on the ground. The team considers how well management responsibilities for child protection, as set out in the statutory guidance, have been met.

## Methods

- Self-assessment of practice, and of management and leadership.
- Case inspections.
- Discussions with officers and staff from within the police and from other organisations.
- 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 in the service about the strengths and weaknesses of current practice (this forms the basis for discussions with HMICFRS); and
- initiate future service improvements and establish a baseline against which to measure progress.

## Self-assessment and case inspection

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

- domestic abuse;
- incidents in which police officers and staff identify children who need help and protection (e.g. children being neglected);
- information-sharing and discussions about children who are 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 'at risk');
- sex offender management;
- the management of missing children;
- child sexual exploitation; and
- the detention of children in police custody.

## Annex B – Definitions and interpretations

In this report, the following words, phrases and expressions in the left-hand column have the meanings assigned to them in the right-hand column. Sometimes, the definition will be followed by a fuller explanation of the matter in question, with references to sources and other material which may be of assistance to the reader.

child	person under the age of 18 years
multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA)	mechanism through which local criminal justice organisations (police, prison and probation trusts) and other agencies dealing with offenders work together in partnership to protect the public from serious harm by managing sexual and violent offenders; established in each of the 42 criminal justice areas in England and Wales by sections 325 to 327B of the Criminal Justice Act 2003
multi-agency risk assessment conference (MARAC)	locally held meeting of statutory and voluntary agency representatives to 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 wellbeing; organisations that attend vary, but are likely to include the police, probation, children's, health and housing services; over 250 MARACs currently in operation throughout England and Wales
multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)	working location in which public sector organisations with responsibilities for the safety of vulnerable people collaborate; it has staff from organisations such as the police and local authority social services, who work alongside one another, sharing information and co-ordinating activities, to help protect the most vulnerable children and adults from harm, neglect and abuse
police and crime commissioner (PCC)	elected entity for a police area; 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; established under section 1, Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011

registered sex  
offender (RSO)

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